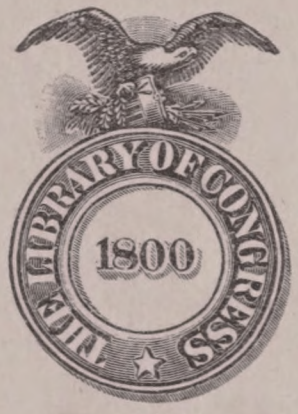
The MIND-READER

MAX RITTENBERG



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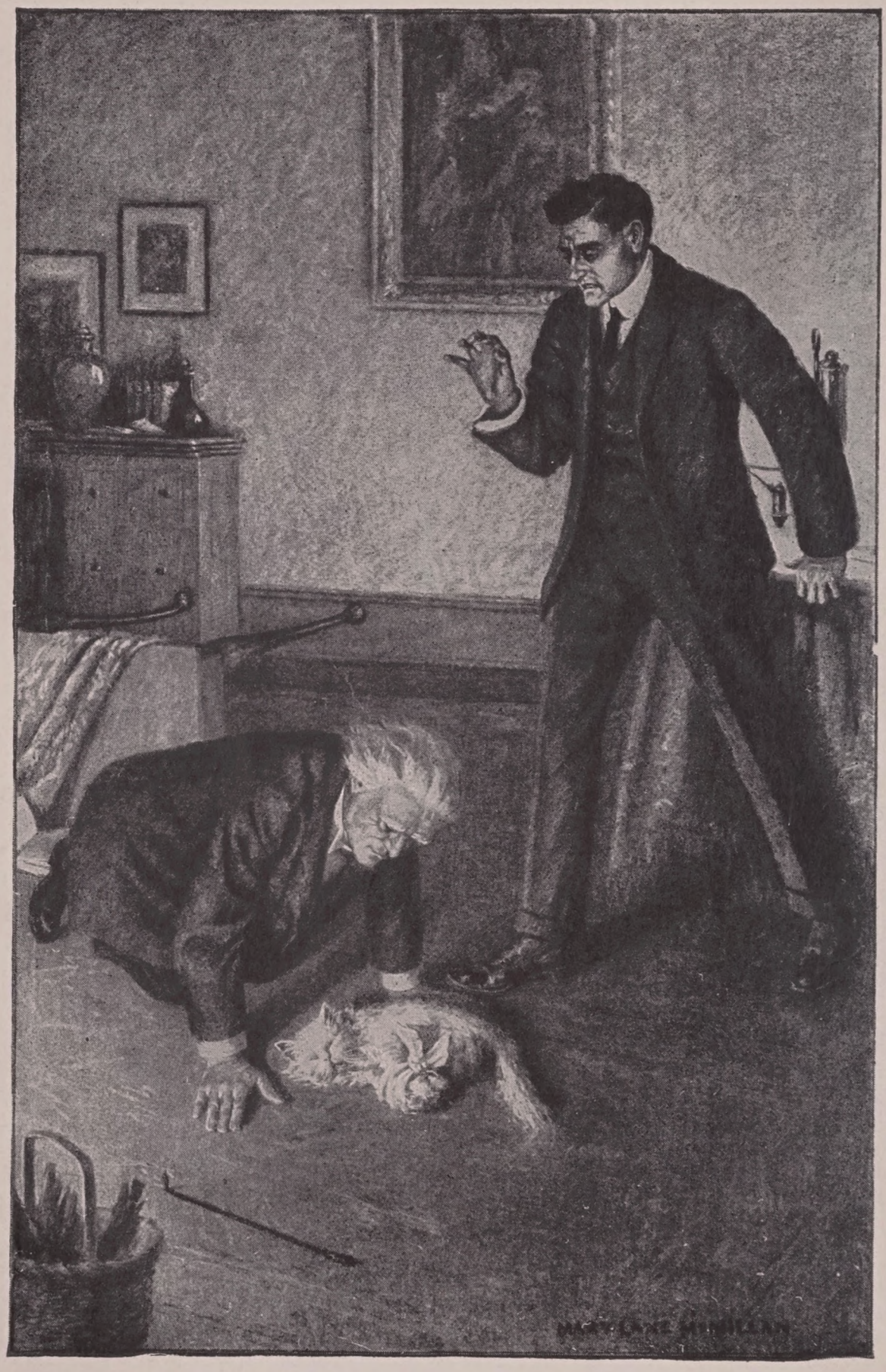

"'Good God! what a devilish scheme!'"

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THE MIND-READER

Being Some Pages from the Strange Life of Dr. Xavier Wycherley

BY

MAX RITTENBERG

ILLUSTRATED

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TO

RUTGER BLEECKER JEWETT

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THE MIND-READER

CHAPTER I

HIS LIFE TO LIVE OVER AGAIN

"WHY not?" quietly remarked the man at the other side of the restaurant table.

His voice was cultured, courteous, delicately fined, and held a peculiarly soothing modulation. His age was given by the silvery hair, the drooping shoulders, the finely chiselled, ascetic features. Yet in his eyes—keen, searching, quietly humorous—there was youth.

"Of course it's impossible," answered Sir Miles Chenieston dreamily. Then he pulled himself together with a start, for the man at the opposite side of the table was a complete stranger to him. It was evening; Monte Carlo; the Café de Paris. They were chance companions at the same table on the terrace, that terrace looking over to the milk-white Casino and the palm-fronds of its garden. They had not exchanged a word previously, but the stranger's remark had fitted in so smoothly with the baronet's brown study that his answer had been given quite involuntarily.

Sir Miles now looked at him coldly and murmured the conventional, "I'm afraid I have not the pleasure . . ."

"Nor I," said the stranger. "But it would be a pity to let stupid convention keep us from being of service to one another. My name is Wycherley, Dr. Xavier Wycherley." He passed over a card. "You were saying that you wished you could only have your life to live over again."

"I said nothing, to the best of my belief. Certainly my thoughts were running in that direction."

"Very much the same thing."

Chenieston stared at him.

The doctor continued: "Now you are wondering whether I am a madman or merely some kind of trickster new to you. Outwardly I appear to be respectable, and yet— Now it is on the tip of your tongue to tell me I am damned intrusive."

He spoke very quietly and evenly, with an undercurrent of gentle irony. Curiously enough, while his eyes were keenly fixed on the baronet, his left hand was engaged in drawing on a wine list a minute portrait of him, marvellously delicate and accurate. Dr. Wycherley, through long self-training, had acquired the faculty of being able to do two things perfectly at the same time. The drawing showed a man of forty-five, clean-shaven, hair brushed straight back from the forehead with that meticulous carefulness characteristic of the conventional Englishman of position, money and abundant leisure. The eyes were hard and tired; around the mouth were the lines of weary satiety; there was a cold reserve in the set of the features when in repose.

Yet behind the conventional reserve was a sense of

humour; and it now came to his rescue as he answered with a smile: "I admit it. I feel that convention would expect me to apologise, but I'm not going to do so. It *is* a damned intrusion, and you know it. Still, let's pass that. You interest me. My name's Chenieston." He took out a card from a card-case in delicately tooled leather.

Dr. Wycherley glanced at the proffered card. "There are not many things that interest you nowadays, Sir Miles. The gaming-table"—he waved his hand in the direction of the *Salle des Jeux*, packed with money-lusting humanity crowding over the green fields of the Goddess Chance—"the gaming-table has no attraction for you; your liqueur has lost its savour; your excellent cigar has gone out from want of attention."

Chenieston looked at it, and then threw it over the balcony of the terrace. "Go on," he said.

"And you wish you had your life to live over again. The world bores you. There are no surprises left. You have tasted everything. There is nothing left to do. It is satiety— No," he added quickly, "I have not been making enquiries about you beforehand. That passing impression of yours is a mistake, though a very natural one. Believe me when I say that I have never seen you before this hour. Nor did I know your name before you gave me your card."

"I believe you," answered Chenieston. The doctor's voice carried unmistakable sincerity. "But I must really keep better control of my features. I *had* flattered myself that my thoughts didn't show on the surface."

"My training has been in the direction of sensing what is below the surface."

"You're a London specialist, I take it?"

"I am a specialist," answered Dr. Wycherley, laying a shade of emphasis on the word, "but my name will not be found on the British register, and my field of action covers the whole world. To-day I am at Monte Carlo, but to-morrow I may be called to Paris, to Berlin, to London, to New York, to Tokio. I go wherever there is call for my services as a mental healer. I am sufficiently selfish to choose, where possible, the exceptional cases—the cases that will add to my knowledge of the human mind. And when I am not actively engaged on a case, I am still studying, as I am now at Monte Carlo."

"Studying?"

"Men and women. Here at Monte Carlo they unmask. . . . But, as I was saying a few minutes ago, why not live your life over again?"

"Mephistopheles is not roaming Monte Carlo," answered Chenieston, "and in any case I don't know that I would care to play Faust. The rôle had its drawbacks."

"The drawbacks were due to Mephistopheles' ideas of a *quid pro quo*, were they not?"

"I have been frank with you," said Chenieston, brusquely, "and I would like you to be equally frank with me. In plain words, what are you driving at?"

Dr. Wycherley looked out over the black, velvety Mediterranean before answering, sipping his coffee slowly. Then he turned on Chenieston with his dark,

penetrating eyes, and answered with quiet emphasis, making the simple phrase carry a world of meaning: "I can give you what you desire."

The baronet looked back at him with suspicion in his eyes. "It's not possible. I don't know you. . . ."

"It *is* possible," was the deliberate answer. "Quite possible. I can give you your life to live over again . . . if you will. . . . But I am not forcing my gifts upon you. One day, perhaps, you may care to come to me. You have my address on the card. I will now bid you good evening."

He rose and bowed courteously in a half-foreign way. Chenieston returned his "good evening" in non-committal fashion. He followed the doctor with his eyes as the latter left the café and made his way through the garden of the palms to the milk-white terraces that overlook the sea.

"What did it mean," thought Chenieston. Of course there was some trickery underlying it. He felt hurriedly for his pocketbook. It was there intact, and he mentally apologised. The man was a gentleman beyond doubt. Suppose it were really possible to . . . ? No, the idea was impossibly fantastic—ridiculous!

* * * * * * *

But the idea was not to be dismissed so lightly. When Dr. Wycherley planted his mental seeds, it was with the skill and experience of a master gardener. All through the winter and ensuing spring the idea started up unbidden into Chenieston's consciousness when he was apparently thinking of other matters. During the

summer he fought against the growing obsession, tore up Dr. Wycherley's card, made himself busy with outdoor sports, even tried to interest himself in photography.

His attempt was a failure. The strange doctor had placed a mental finger on the baronet's mind, and the finger pressed upon it ceaselessly. Chenieston was indeed bored by the world—satiated at forty-five. He had title, money, wide estates, health—to outward appearance a man to be envied. But he had no wife or child, brother or sister, and with his distant relatives he was out of sympathy. His short married life of many years ago had been a disastrous episode; for his young wife had quickly plunged into the frivolities of a "smart" set, against his wishes, until they had drifted further and further apart and love had turned to hatred.

Chenieston divorced her—for cause—settled a lump sum on her, and put her out of his life. Since then no other woman had made a niche in his heart. His happiness he would entrust to no other's keeping.

But happiness kept to oneself turns sour—like bread hoarded away. He had sought happiness in selfish pleasures—and found only satiety. He had made a wilderness and called it happiness.

At the end of the summer he was shooting wearily, mechanically, without pleasure, on his Scotch grouse-moor. His house-party included a married couple, the Trevors, whose evident happiness in one another made him bitter. In the gun-room one evening Trevor be-

came confidential concerning his wife. Said he: "The little woman had a bad time of it a year ago—thought I was going to lose her. Nothing organic, you know—mental worry. The loss of our child. Doctors could do nothing. Then we came across an extraordinary fellow—I believe he's got Italian blood in him—anyhow he made my wife a new woman. Lives in a queer little island on an Italian lake—Isola Salvatore it's called. . . . "

"Name Wycherley? " asked Chenieston. That had been the solitary address on the doctor's card—"Isola Salvatore" and nothing further.

"Yes. . . . By the way, we never mention the child. It belongs to the past. My wife has forgotten."

"Forgotten! " It sounded incredible.

"Completely."

CHAPTER II

THE GARDEN OF SPICES

OCTOBER on Lake Rovellasco is the picked month of the year. Even Chenieston, satiated with the glories of the world, felt stirred by the quiet beauty of the scene as he looked out from the window of his hotel by the lakeside. Rovellasco is not yet an exploited tourist centre. Presently, perhaps, we shall see blatantly advertised "A Week in Rosy Rovellasco for Five Guineas!" and then good-bye to the quiet scene that Sir Miles gazed on.

At the far end, where the mountains crowd down upon the lake and take it to their arms, was a solitary islet deeply wooded. From amongst the trees peeped out a white glimpse of a villa. Chenieston's eyes came back to that white spot again and again. Finally he seemed to arrive at a decision, for he entered his room and started to pack his portmanteau. He was travelling without his man.

He had the bag carried down to the lakeside, and hailed a boatman in halting Italian: "I want you to row me to Isola Salvatore."

The boatman shrank a little and crossed himself hurriedly. "I do not like to," he answered. "No one likes to. He sends a boat ashore himself for his visitors. Perhaps if the signore will wait . . ."

Chenieston unwrapped a couple of five-lire notes from a roll and showed them silently.

The boatman hesitated. His feelings were plainly torn between fear and greed.

Chenieston took out some further loose change from his trouser pocket.

"If I do, signore, you will not ask me to set foot on the island?"

"Very well," answered Chenieston, curtly, and seated himself in the boat. He felt a natural disgust at the boatman's fear, but at the same time a feeling of something uncanny came down upon his own mind like a mist slowly driving over the hills. This man Wycherley must have queer powers. After a while the baronet endeavoured to draw the boatman into conversation, but whenever the questions came round to the subject of Isola Salvatore and its owner, the man evaded them or affected to misunderstand.

As they drew near the islet the boatman suddenly crossed himself and muttered an invocation for heavenly protection.

"What is it?" asked Chenieston, sharply. He strongly objected to all this mystery.

"Look, signore! See for yourself!" The man pointed tremblingly to a small dark object tearing through the water around the island.

"It is a dog—that is all," answered Chenieston. "Why all this fuss about a dog? Certainly it is swimming faster than any dog I have ever seen in the water."

"He is not human, signore! Look, as he approaches, at his eyes!"

The dog tore towards them, but as though unconscious of their presence. The boatman hurriedly rowed out of its way. As it passed, Chenieston noted with something of a shock that only the whites of its eyes were to be seen, although the eyelids were full open.

"You see, signore, he is a hound of hell!"

"Get on!" said Chenieston, brusquely.

As they approached a small landing-stage on the islet, a servant came to meet them. He was clearly foreign, but spoke English quite adequately: "My master bids you welcome, Sir Miles. He expects you, but is unfortunately called away at the moment. He asks you to excuse him until this evening."

Chenieston was for the moment surprised at his name being known to the servant. This was succeeded by the very natural suspicion that there might be some means of communication between the hotel and Isola Salvatore. He had seen too much of the world and its trickeries to take good faith entirely for granted. But as he followed the man into the villa, the atmosphere of peace and restfulness and aloofness from the vanities of the world seeped in upon Chenieston and made him feel somehow soiled by that momentary suspicion of trickery.

The room assigned to him was furnished with great simplicity but equal good taste. It was panelled entirely in some sweet but faintly scented Eastern wood—Japanese cypress, he afterwards learnt. The floor was bare except for one Persian rug harmonising its age-softened reds and browns with the reddish-brown of the panelling. The wooden bed, excessively simple, had a

plain white coverlet over it. The solitary ornament to the room—hung facing the bed as the occupant would wake to see it—was a mezzotint of Botticelli's "Primavera." The eye, leaving this, would turn to the wide-open veranda windows looking upon the lake curving down in gentle folds of bay to the little town of Rovellasco at the far end.

The simplicity and dignity of that room brought an inward feeling of humility to the world-weary man as he entered. The room was a silent rebuke to the suspicion which had momentarily entered his thoughts. For a second time he made a mental apology to Dr. Wycherley.

Until dinner Chenieston wandered about the garden of the house—a garden of botanical wonders. The ends of the earth seemed to have been ransacked for strange trees and plants with which to clothe the isle—camphor-trees, pepper-trees, palm-trees, trees of strange spices; cedars of Lebanon and deodars from the Himalayas and cryptomerias from the Far East; pines from the Rockies and eucalypti from New Zealand; wonderful vines and creepers everywhere. It was a veritable isle of spices. It breathed of peace and forgetfulness. Chenieston felt strangely soothed in spirit.

After a dinner simple but in perfect gastronomic taste, the baronet took his cigar to a seat under a giant magnolia, looking out over the dark lake and the snow peaks to the north. He fell into a reverie from which he was roused by suddenly finding Dr. Wycherley smoking a cigarette beside him in silence.

"Excuse my not coming to welcome you before,"

said the doctor. "I had to go to New York last night —a patient of mine whose wealth is a curse to her."

"I hope you had a pleasant trip," answered Chenieston, conventionally. Then he became aware of the extraordinary statement made by the doctor and added hurriedly: "I thought for the moment you said New York."

"Yes, that is what I said—of course, I did not mean in body."

"You seem to have made a curious reputation for yourself in these parts," said Chenieston, brusquely.

The doctor smiled and answered with gentle irony: "I treated some of the peasants round here—'cast out devils' and so forth. They were very undecided whether to class me as an archangel or a lieutenant of Lucifer's; finally they settled on the latter."

"Your dog . . . "

"Ah, yes, you met Rolf taking his four o'clock constitutional. I should explain that he has a perfect horror of the water in the ordinary way. When he was a puppy somebody tried to drown him, and I came to his rescue—nothing will induce him to go into the water now."

"He looked as if he were swimming in his sleep—it was very queer."

"Precisely. Post-hypnotic suggestion—ordered somnambulism, if you prefer it. It is good for his health to take a daily swim . . . that suggests undeveloped possibilities in everyday life, does it not—draught horses, mules, elephants, and so on? You take my meaning?"

With his left hand Dr. Wycherley was making delicate experiments with the almost human leaves of a "sensitive mimosa," though all the time his eyes were fixed on his guest.

Chenieston drew himself together sharply and began: "That was not quite what I came to see you about."

"There is no need for you to go into a detailed explanation. I sensed that when you arrived at the lakeside yesterday. You want to hear more—to continue our Monte Carlo conversation. Especially you want to know just precisely what I can offer you, and, to put it bluntly, what my terms are."

"There seems no need for me to hold up my side of the conversation."

Dr. Wycherley smiled again. "Not just at present. This is of course elementary and quite preliminary. Later on, should you wish to try the experiment, I shall ask you to talk for days at a time. . . . To begin with, what are my terms for giving you your life over again? Not money, for of that I have ample for my simple needs. Not influence or power, for that I can build for myself. No, my demands are less material." He paused.

"Well, what can I give you?"

"Data."

"I don't follow you."

"Scientific data—material for my life-work, psychological research. I should ask you to report progress. To bring, say twice a year, the book of your

life for my inspection. *I want to know what a man would do with his second life.*"

"There are devilish possibilities in that," answered Chenieston, setting his teeth.

"Precisely. If I don't inspire you with confidence, you would be an utterly weak fool to trust yourself in my hands for an instant. If I were a poor man, the temptation might be irresistible; if I were a criminal man, the consequences might be horrible; if I were an enemy of Society, the consequences might be appalling. It is for you, a man of the world, to make up your mind what sort of a man I am. On the one hand you have the evidence of the peasants around here; on the other hand . . ."

"I met the Trevors," interrupted Chenieston.

"That was a very simple case—like the amputation of a finger to a surgeon. Your case, I would warn you frankly, would be more in the nature of a major internal operation. Have you the courage?"

"Explain to me what you would do."

Dr. Wycherley threw away his cigarette. "Let us get at fundamentals—let me show you the psychological basis of happiness. Happiness is just contentment—neither riches nor power can of themselves give a man happiness. Happiness comes from within. The world laughs at the millionaire who says that he wishes he were poor and obscure—but *he* speaks from experience. He has bought dearly the knowledge I now place before you. Happiness is just contentment; and contentment is based on illusion. Contentment sees the good and ignores the evil. Contentment forgets. Contentment

makes every day a new age, a wonderful experience opening out vistas of a rose-strewn future. *You* live in the past—every new experience as it arises is stale to you because you mentally compare it with the past. You have seen everything, tasted everything, done everything. Your experience is a daily burden to you.

"Now suppose you could forget all that had happened to you from twenty-one to—shall we say forty-five? The world would be a new place to you; your life would be before and not behind you. You would be a young man in mind again."

"But not in body," interrupted Chenieston.

"No, one cannot altogether put back the development of the body. But 'a man is as young as he feels' is an old saying, and a very true one. I know boys of fifty—I expect you know some also. The mind reacts on the body."

"To have a blank page from twenty-one to forty-five would hold its disadvantages," said the baronet, thoughtfully.

"Precisely. Therein lies the difficulty of the operation. One has to cut out only what is deleterious. It is like removing a great cancerous growth from the body. One must use the scalpel very warily. It is not an operation for the raw medical student. You place your mental life in the hands of the trained surgeon . . . if you have faith in him. That is why I said a little while ago that I should ask you to talk for days at a time. Your past life would have to be laid bare to me, and to my judgment you would have to confide the

decision of what should be cut out and what left in place. There is the matter in a nutshell."

"You propose to hack at my mind, my Ego, my individuality?"

"There you betray an ignorance of psychology. You confuse several distinct issues. I cannot touch your Ego or higher self—*we* call it the 'consciousness' —I can only operate on your lower self, the 'sub-consciousness,' the warden of your memories. In the hypnotic state we converse and treat only with the patient's sub-consciousness."

"Then where does the higher self go to?"

"Where does it go to in sleep, I ask you in return? But let me lend you a scientific book to-night which will put the matter before you in detail."

"Thanks," said Chenieston. "I'll read it. To-morrow I will give you my decision."

* * * * * * *

In after days the month that Chenieston spent on Isola Salvatore seemed to him like a hazy dreamland. He remembered vaguely that Dr. Wycherley had placed him at evenfall of the second day under the great magnolia, stretched out in a gloriously easy chair, and had suspended in front of and above him an imprisoned firefly. On this he had to concentrate his gaze until tired eyelids closed down over tired eyes. Meanwhile the doctor was talking to him—quietly, evenly, soothingly. Sleep had stolen upon him—smooth, restful, heavenly sleep.

He had no direct knowledge of what had happened

to him in sleep, but Dr. Wycherley told him that he was then talking *en rapport* with his sub-consciousness for hours at a time, bringing out his past life, ordering forgetfulness of this, allowing remembrance of that.

The month was to Chenieston at once an eternity and a moment.

In the intervals between the hypnotic trances he had written and signed long documents for the instruction of his lawyers, his bankers and his stewards, directing the disposal of his estates amongst his distant relatives and various charities, should he not return again to his world. He was to give out that he had gone to a vague somewhere to shoot big game—a handy excuse—and he was to start life afresh under a new name and with a few thousands only as capital. He was to be one of the world's workers.

He began to grow a beard to change his outward identity, and Dr. Wycherley spent long hours training up within him a new voice while in the hypnotic state. Change the voice and you make a man unrecognisable to his friends.

When Stephen Carruthers—this was the name agreed upon—left Isola Salvatore he staggered mentally as a man staggers bodily when he leaves the nursing home. His past life was mainly a blank to him, though there remained certain memories which Dr. Wycherley had judged advisable. There were sudden gaps in his memory stitched together and working unsmoothly, as the muscles work unsmoothly where the surgeon has used the knife. Queer flashes of uncon-

nected incidents came upon him every now and then, dazzling him. He felt horribly helpless.

The doctor accompanied him to land and stayed with him at intervals for some months while they roamed the Continent together. Gradually Carruthers began to feel his feet—to speak metaphorically—and a great happiness surged over him. Everything was new, fresh, unexplored. The Riviera had before seemed to him a string of pleasure-cities painted like the cheeks and lips of a painted woman—a horrible rouged outrage upon Nature; now he saw the good and not the evil, and it was fresh to him and very pleasant to his eyes. The blood within him danced and sparkled like champagne. He thought and spoke as a youngster fresh from college.

Carruthers was a new man.

CHAPTER III

THE ZEAL OF THE SCIENTIST

AT the age of forty-five—to outward appearance—a man cannot very well study for and enter one of the close professions. The few oldish men who do walk the hospitals or eat dinners at the Temple are regarded by the world with good-natured, rather contemptuous pity. Carruthers, finding himself in possession of a few thousand pounds only, insufficient to live on idly but offering possibilities for earning an income, chose to enter business, which has no age-barrier.

He returned to London. As far as his memory went, he had not seen it since he was a boy of twenty-one or so, and to his eyes great changes had taken place. They struck him sharply like a blow in the face delivered in the dark; at first he was confused and deafened. It took time for him to adjust himself.

Queer flashes of sub-conscious memory stirred him to actions which were meaningless to his understanding. One day, for instance, he found himself walking mechanically up the steps of a mansion in Berkeley Square and ringing the bell. A butler appeared and asked him his business. Suddenly, to his painful confusion, Carruthers discovered that he had no business there,

had no reason to be walking up those steps and ringing that bell. He pulled himself together, and for the sake of saying something asked if the master of the house were in. The butler, looking at him suspiciously as someone of dubious intentions, replied that Sir Miles Chenieston was abroad, and edged him down the steps again. The name seemed somehow familiar to Carruthers, but he could not place the connection. It was one of many worrying episodes.

With part of his money he bought a share in a small publishing firm, and in the interest of the work the scars in his memory were smoothed out of conscious thought. The semi-professional aspect of the publishing business appealed to his natural instincts; and since his partner, Bailey by name, was easy to get on with, the work gave him keen pleasure. "Office hours" meant nothing to him, often he would stay on at Booksellers' Row long after the clerks had left and the neighbouring offices were cold and dark, and the grey ghosts of little old caretakers came out of their daylight hiding-places to dust and sweep. He was keen to build up the business into a large organisation.

"How young you are!" said Bailey to him one day, half chaffingly, half enviously. "I declare you make me feel like an old fogey."

"I *am* young," answered Carruthers. "Why shouldn't I be? Everything is so new and fresh; life rushes into one full-tide. Isn't it the same with you?"

"I wish I knew your secret."

"What secret?" Carruthers felt, for a brief fraction of a second, a queer mental confusion that was like

a sudden stab of pain. "I haven't got secrets, my dear fellow."

"I only meant the secret of your perpetual youth," his partner hastened to explain. The subject dropped.

Twice a year, spring and autumn, Carruthers took a holiday from work and journeyed to the islet on Lake Rovellasco in unconscious fulfilment of his contract with Dr. Wycherley. Some force within him impelled him to steep himself in the waters of peace, to feel the garden of spices close around him and take him to itself in an ecstacy of joy unutterable. He yielded himself to the soothing passes of the mental healer—all unconscious he laid his soul bare to the gaze of Dr. Wycherley, who studied him as the biologist studies the growth of some strange new organism.

The mental healer was a combination of scientist and humanitarian which is far from usual. As the latter, his warm human sympathies went out unceasingly to the weak, the oppressed, the suffering, the sick of body and the sick of mind. But as a scientist he would for the time being forget the patient in the subject. Carruthers in the hypnotic state was a *subject* of absorbing interest to the doctor, and he did not scruple to probe the man's most inner, most intimate feelings. He had explained that frankly to the baronet before the latter had consented to undergo the mental operation. "I want to know what a man would do with his second life," the doctor had said. In return for this new life he was giving to Carruthers, he was acquiring scientific data which were priceless beyond money. Carruthers

was to him alternately a friend and a subject for scientific exploration.

The doctor no longer made suggestions to his subject while in the hypnotic state. He had no desire or intention to direct Carruthers' actions. He merely wished to observe, as an exceptionally privileged spectator, what Carruthers would make of his second life, and the study of the man gave him the keenest scientific pleasure. The world-weary idler, the parasite on the toil of other men and women, was becoming transformed to a worker amongst the common labours of humanity, and in his work he was acquiring a new set of feelings, emotions, main-springs of action which to Dr. Wycherley were of intense interest.

But what would happen when the inevitable woman came into Carruthers' life? The doctor knew intimately of the former marriage and its unhappy ending, of the baronet's aloofness from women except of the superficial plane of the *flâneur* who seeks a temporary, sensual amusement. Chenieston had dallied with many women, but had given his inner self to none but the wife he had divorced and put out of his life. Could he, in his new personality, be stirred by real love, or would the Chenieston career have killed that possibility? Could the mental regeneration extend to that most intimate, most sacred of a man's emotions, or would a woman still be to Carruthers, as to Chenieston, a mere plaything for a few idle weeks?

When the inevitable did happen, it was, to the keen pleasure of Dr. Wycherley the scientist, on one of Carruthers' visits to the island. Carruthers spent his

holidays in fishing, bathing and rowing amongst the peaceful solitudes of Lake Rovellasco. He made great friends with Rolf, who, barring only the bathe, was ready to accompany him anywhere. Rolf was a big, shaggy-haired English sheep-dog, born for friendship.

It was on a lake excursion that the inevitable happened. The occasion was pure chance—one of those sudden squalls that occasionally sweep down in fury on Lake Rovellasco from the snow-peaks, and toss the waters as a farmer pitchforks the hay. She was alone in a light skiff with a local boatman, who unexpectedly lost an oar, lost nerve, and implored help from above.

Carruthers, not far off, saw the danger and rowed hard to help, Rolf barking eagerly on the front seat. Nothing could have been worse for the boatman's peace of mind. Abandoning the other oar, he grovelled on the floor of the boat, while the waves slapped in angrily.

"Can you catch a rope?" shouted Carruthers.

Mrs. Mannering pluckily climbed over the prostrate boatman to the front of the skiff, caught the rope not unskilfully and tied it to a ring. With the skiff in tow, Carruthers faced the wind and kept head to waves for an hour or more until the squall died away and the sun came out to smoothe down the waters.

It was natural for Carruthers to call at her hotel next day to make polite enquiries. But it was more than mere politeness that took him; he had felt strangely attracted towards this woman no longer young, no longer beautiful, and occupying the position of a paid nurse to a testy old gentleman with half-a-dozen imaginary ailments. Something stronger than himself

made him linger beyond the time of a conventional call —made him row over to land the next day, and the day after, contriving to meet Helen Mannering on the water-front where the lace work and the wood-mosaic work shops display their allurements, and all the little world of Rovellasco saunters.

He even suffered gladly the querulous egoism of Colonel Padgett so that he might be near Mrs. Mannering. Dr. Wycherley, to whom nothing was hidden, spoke to him in gentle sympathy one evening when Carruthers sat musing under his favourite magnolia-tree.

"A woman in a thousand," said the doctor.

"In a million," answered Carruthers.

There was silence, a silence of mutual understanding.

"Why not?" asked the doctor. His sensitive left hand was rapidly drawing a tiny portrait, a very perfect miniature, of Mrs. Mannering on a scrap of paper.

"Yes, why not?" echoed Carruthers. "It's a dog's life for her. . . . I could make her ideally happy. . . . There's sympathy between us beyond anything I've ever felt. . . . You believe in the idea of one's affinity, Doctor?"

"I do not know," returned Dr. Wycherley, gravely and slowly. "As a scientist I say that I do not know. One feels that it is true, but there is no evidence. If there is only one affinity for each of us in all this wide world, what are the chances of meeting? Infinitesimal. . . . No, there is no evidence. It is one of my problems."

So Carruthers took courage in hand and contrived his opportunity.

The witchery of night on lake and mountain was around them as they stood by a corner of a balcony, far enough away from the few other guests of the hotel to give them solitude. They had been talking disjointedly, with many intervals of silence, speaking now and again of topics which touched them in common—art, music, books, especially books, for Carruthers was now whole-heartedly an enthusiast in the field of publishing.

Then came the moment when his voice changed from the ease of impersonal topics, and went deeper in tone, as a man's voice does when he has to speak of emotions which touch him as sacred.

"Colonel Padgett tells me you are to move on soon," he said.

Mrs. Mannering realised the significance of the new tone in his voice, and a slight tremour went through her.

"Yes," she answered. "We go to Rome."

"Then I mustn't wait—I mustn't let opportunity slip by. Helen, you know what I have to say to you. We were made for one another. Every fibre in me tells me that's true. I'm fulltide with happiness, and I have to share it. I can share it only with you." He spoke deeply and passionately, breathing fast.

She turned away.

"Helen, I'm not a rich man, but I can give you all the best that's in me. Won't you take me? Look me in the eyes and read me! You can't misunderstand my feelings!"

He caught at her hands; she drew them away, and her voice quivered as she answered:

"I can't, I can't! Don't you read my feelings? Has love blinded you?"

Carruthers felt utterly at sea. "I don't understand at all," he murmured. "I thought your husband was dead. I thought you were free. I thought my feelings were echoing in yours."

"Yes, but—" she paused, searching in his face as though to read some riddle there which eluded her.

"Be frank with me. Be fair to me," he urged. "Have I been too hasty? Too selfish in forcing myself upon you? Don't you realise I'm passionately in love with you, and that means I wouldn't hurt your feelings for worlds. Tell me where my mistake lies. Tell me what you want from me!"

Again she turned away and looked out over the witchery of lake and mountain, as though to seek inspiration or courage from them. When at length she spoke to him, her voice was firm with resolve:

"Don't think that I'm rating lightly what you've offered me. But you are not yourself—this is a moment of madness. If I accepted, it might mean a lifetime's misery—for both of us. When you *awoke* . . . Look me in the eyes, look at me well!"

Carruthers looked, puzzled, confessed himself at sea: "I don't understand at all. I only see what is very beautiful to me, and what I hold very dear. This is not quixotism. Your position matters nothing to me. I see you for what you are, and I want you—I want you passionately! God, how I want you!"

"Give me till to-morrow," said Helen suddenly.

"To-morrow, then, I come for my answer," he acquiesced.

"We'll say good-night now."

His eyes followed her with hungry longing as she made her way from the balcony to the lighted rooms of the hotel, and he knew that as concerned his own feelings there was no possible mistake. Her hesitation must be the natural one of a woman whose feelings had not kept pace with his own. She was in love with him, but she needed time to make that big final decision.

To-morrow she would say "Yes."

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But in the morning he found only Colonel Padgett, raging fussily and repetitiously:

"By Gad, sir, it's outrageous, positively outrageous! Runs away without saying a word—leaves me to shift for myself! Don't you realise, sir, that she was paid, *paid* to look after me? How am I to go for my morning walk? This will make me seriously ill. I'm feeling damnable twinges already. I never heard of anything so heartless in all my born days. It's outrageous, sir, positively outrageous! I'll put the police on her track! Leaves me a note to say that she has to run away—gives no reason—gives no address. I'll report her to the nursing agency, I'll have her cashiered. I never heard of anything so disgraceful in all my born days!"

"Did Mrs. Mannering leave any note for me?" interrupted Carruthers.

"How do I know? D'you think I've had any time to . . . ?"

But Carruthers had made off to the bureau, where the hotel clerk handed him an envelope which he tore open eagerly in the privacy of a quiet corner. It contained only a little bag of dried herbs and a brief note: "All night I have wrestled with temptation, Miles. I have fought and conquered; I will not spoil your life again. This little bag of herbs will explain to you everything. 'Rosemary for remembrance.' Goodbye. Helen."

He put the bag, *her* bag, to his lips, and in his brain there was as it were a snapping and rending of the stitches that bound up the wounded memory. He had known that little bag of dried herbs before. But where—where? In heaven's name where? He felt the question was driving him mad—the torture was unbearable. At the railway station he discovered that she had taken a ticket for Milan. There was no train in that direction until the afternoon. At Milan the trail would be lost. She might take train again in any one of a dozen directions. What could he do?

Then the soothing shadow of the mental healer came over the glare in his mind, and he rowed feverishly back to Isola Salvatore. Dr. Wycherley's eyes lighted up with the enthusiasm of the scientist as Carruthers explained and showed him the letter.

"Splendid, splendid!" said the doctor. "Your experience is the first direct evidence of the affinity theory, that, so far as my knowledge goes, has ever been obtained. This is well worth the trouble of the experi-

ment!" Then he added with his gentle ironic touch: "The zeal of the scientist—it forgets the patient. Excuse me, Carruthers, for my scientific selfishness. Be quite easy in mind. I will surely find her for you. If you will let me put you to sleep, it will soothe the brain."

"But how can you find her? She's run away deliberately. She'll cover up her tracks. Oh, it's maddening! Preposterous! I tell you there's no reason to it. We're made for one another—suited in every way. There's nothing against me. You know that well. And there's nothing on her side to keep us apart—that I'm sure of, positive of! . . . How can you find her?"

"The bag of herbs," answered the doctor. "It is very personal to her—charged with her personality. Rolf!"

The big shaggy-haired dog trotted up to him, wagging its tail. Dr. Wycherley looked at it eye to eye, and commanded sharply: "Sleep!"

The dog's big round eyes blinked and then closed down. In a few moments the animal sank to the ground and rolled on its side, inert.

"His suggestibility is very highly developed," explained the doctor, "and nowadays a mere command will send him into deep hypnosis. It took me a long, long time to train him. At one time I nearly gave it up in despair; then I hit on a new way to . . . but this would scarcely interest you. I will just say briefly that in hypnosis proper the hyperæsthesia of the senses is of the order four to seven in men and women; that is, their sense perceptions in many cases become four to seven times keener than in the normal working state.

That is a matter of everyday knowledge. But what is not generally known is the effect in the case of animals. I have found in them most astonishing magnification of the senses. I will take him to Milan and start him on the trail. He will succeed. Watch!"

He put the bag of herbs to Rolf's nose, and the dog rose slowly and began with closed eyes uncannily to nose the garden for a trail.

"Stop!" commanded the doctor, and the dog obediently stood still, rigid.

"Now let me put you to sleep," suggested Dr. Wycherley gently, and Carruthers acquiesced.

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When Carruthers woke again he found Helen by his side, watching him in silence. He held out his arms: "You're back again. Thank God!"

"Wait," she said softly, "let me explain. Don't you really know me, Miles? Dr. Wycherley tells me you've forgotten, but it seems incredible. I can't understand how you could forget me."

"Miles! Why do you call me Miles?"

"I was your wife."

He looked at her in utter bewilderment, and again that feeling of the rending of stitches in his brain came over him.

"I was your wife," she continued, with a softness in her voice that made his pulses leap. "I was very young—very wilful, very foolish. If only you had been more patient with me—had expected less. You asked too much from a young girl. I wanted to grasp

enjoyment with both hands—to bathe in it, to take up great handfuls and let it trickle over me. You were unreasonably jealous of me. I had no harm in my thoughts at first. I only wanted to enjoy the good things of life. But your jealousy drove me to give you real cause for jealousy. My pride was hurt—I wanted to show you that other men valued me. I wanted to pique you and then I was carried away in a whirl of the senses. . . . "

"I don't remember anything like that. Surely you're imagining . . . "

"You divorced me."

"How could I? I only met you on the lake."

"You settled a sum of money on me for my maintenance. I had expected to marry the man, but after the divorce he cooled towards me, and I realised that I'd been just an amusing episode to him—nothing more. I went away to the Continent to travel and wipe out the thoughts of him. Later I fell in with another man whom I thought I could trust, and I did trust him—implicitly. In short, he was a swindler hunting for easy game, and he tricked me out of the money you'd settled on me. That was the crowning humiliation. I hid myself away from my friends, took up another name, and set to work to make my own living."

"Where's that man who tricked you?" asked Carruthers sharply.

She shook her head. "I doubt if you'll ever find him. But what does it matter now? Let him pass."

"So you took to nursing as a profession?"

"Yes. It made me independent, and helped to give

me back some of my self-respect. I'm glad now that I had to turn to it. . . . When I met you here at Rovellasco I didn't recognise you at first—you've changed so, Miles. But gradually the little mannerisms, the little tricks of speech, told me it was you. That evening on the terrace when your voice changed and your innermost self came to ask me. . . . Then I knew for certain. . . . But it was so puzzling to me. How could you forget your own wife, unless it were some form of momentary delusion? I was afraid you would awake presently to recognise me, and then it would mean misery for both of us. I couldn't trust myself to stay any longer near you, so I ran away. Dr. Wycherley traced me to Florence in some extraordinary manner, and when he found me he explained what had happened to your memories. So I came back with him."

"Dear love, you're back again. Nothing else matters." He held out his arms to her.

But she drew back. "Miles, you must realise that you divorced me. Whether you remember it or not, it's a fact which neither of us can gloss over."

"But if I don't remember, what does it all matter? It may be as you say, but it doesn't affect my feelings towards you in the slightest."

"You divorced me for good cause. I want you to realise that."

"I don't remember. Can't you see, Helen, that I don't *want* to remember. Someone told me that to forget is to be happy. He was right. I want only you, Helen. You as you are to-day—as I feel and *know* you are. What has the girl you speak of to do with

the woman I love to-day? *She* belongs to the past—*you* belong to the present and the future. . . . "

"We have to live with our past, dear."

"A horrible creed! Let the dead past moulder with its dead. Say rather that we have to live with our future. That's my creed, dear love. Won't you make it yours?"

She bent down, and his arms closed around her hungrily. Their lips met.

Presently there came a discreet knock at the door, and the mental healer entered. There was a kindly smile in his eyes as he said:

"I see that I am soon to lose a very interesting patient. He will no longer be coming to visit me at my island."

"We'll both come," answered Helen warmly.

"Yes, but our compact will be ended, for he will have secrets now that even the zeal of the scientist must not intrude upon. Science must step aside—however unwillingly. On behalf of science, I tender a very reluctant good-bye."

"You've done so much for us, and we can't repay it," said Carruthers.

"I am more than repaid already," answered Dr. Wycherley. "I have learnt much from you. What higher reward can any scientist ask for?"

CHAPTER IV

BLIND JUSTICE

DR. WYCHERLEY'S degrees were not the British degrees. In his younger days the prejudice of the English medical profession against anything approaching hypnotism or mental suggestion had been intense. Many fine men of advanced thought had been driven out of the ranks of the profession in England on the score of the practice of hypnotism. To-day, of course, that prejudice has largely been overridden. The Harley Street district has its mental practitioners equally with its specialists in every other line of medicine and surgery. The *Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*, holding the keys of the profession in their hands, now lend their dignified approval to hypnotic healing.

Dr. Wycherley's early studies had been pursued at Continental cliniques, and when in later years he was offered the honorary degrees which Oxford and Cambridge and Edinburgh bestow on men of European reputation, he steadily refused them. His name was not on the British medical register; nevertheless, he kept a consulting-room in London, and it was his custom to travel there three or four times a year in order to sift

over cases which might need his very specialised help, and at the same time afford him new experiences in the work that was his life-passion.

The rooms he occupied when in London were in 'Adelphi Terrace, that quiet backwater not fifty yards from the tearing hustle of the Strand, and yet in atmosphere a hundred miles away. From the window of his consulting-room he looked down over the soft greenery of the Embankment Gardens, and across the quiet majesty of the Thames carrying its eternal message from hills to sea. Beyond lay South London, a labyrinth of grey, pinched, huddled life, and yet so beautified by the mists of evening as to inspire a Whistler to compose a masterpiece.

Many of Dr. Wycherley's cases naturally came to him through recommendation; but others were of his own seeking. It was in this latter fashion that he became involved in the murder trial of the young artist Neil Lane, of which the inner story was never made public for reasons of state policy. The doctor did not first hear of the case through the newspapers, since he had a strong aversion to the frothy sensationalism and cheap culture of the daily papers, and rarely glanced at them. He heard of the case through a friend of his, a K. C. who held a brief for the defence, and the summary of its strange features given to him by the barrister impelled Dr. Wycherley to attend the Old Bailey for the concluding day of the trial. It seemed as though it might hold some bearing on his own life-work.

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"I will now put my client in the box," said Hatchard, K. C., leader for the defence.

There was an instant stir in court, a vivid quickening of interest. The big moment of the murder trial, to see which fashionable spectators had schemed and cajoled and bribed, was at hand. One could feel the blood pulsing through the court.

Up to now the defence had proceeded on lines dull and unstimulating to an audience which had come to see a man's soul laid naked. Witness after witness had been called to testify to Neil Lane's good character and his more or less friendly relations with the murdered man. What more could the defence do? An alibi was impossible, and the finger-print evidence was damning.

Never did circumstantial evidence point so clearly to the guilty man. Stokes had been murdered in his studio, stabbed in cold blood while he slept on the couch by his studio fire. The weapon was a narrow, vicious-looking thrusting sword which he had brought back from the East and had always kept hanging amongst some other Eastern trophies on the wall by the fireside. It had been plunged into the murdered man's body again and again, and then by some strange oversight or queer whim on the part of the murderer had been carefully placed on the floor by the side of the couch, parallel to it.

A friend of the artist's, a professional model, had testified that on the night of the murder she had called at his rooms and found him alive at 11 o'clock. He had one of his malarial attacks coming on, and had

made up a couch, by the right-hand side of his studio fire, on which he was lying down. He had been drinking heavily and taking large doses of quinine, and the girl had found him surly and dazed and out of temper —in no mood for company. So at his request she had mixed him a stiff glass of brandy and hot water, and then left the studio.

Medical evidence had placed the time of the murder between midnight and 2 A.M. No suspicion attached to the girl, who was fortunately able to account for her movements after 11:10 on that night.

Between Stokes' studio and Neil Lane's was a trail via skylight, roof and parapet, which constituted the damning evidence of the case. It showed beyond human doubt that a man had crept and climbed from one studio to the other, and back again. On the soot of the roof were an abundance of slipper marks and finger-prints. Whose marks were they?

The prosecution claimed that they were Neil Lane's —had apparently proved their point up to the hilt. What surer evidence of guilt could be produced?

And yet officials and spectators, in spite of the overwhelming logic of the situation, were impressed by the open, boyish, impulsive bearing of the prisoner as he stepped eagerly from the dock to the witness-box. Now at last there could be action—personal effort—instead of that terrible wait-and-do-nothing while witness after witness for the Crown had pieced together the chain of merciless evidence which was to hang him.

In Neil Lane was no "iron nerve," no cold calculation of demeanour. He was a mere boy fighting for

his life against the relentless machinery of justice—squaring his shoulders and taking a grip of himself in this last desperate effort to escape the gallows. The spectators quivered with the excitement of the chase, as when the hunted animal turns and doubles before the hounds close in upon him and rend him to pieces.

"Tell us now," his counsel was saying, "what you were doing at 9 o'clock on the night of the murder."

"I was in my studio studying a history of Flemish art—Duchesne's. I was tired that evening, and had settled down in my armchair in a dressing-gown and slippers."

"Until what time did you read?"

"Until about 9:30. Then Mr. Gollen came in. I gave him a whisky-and-soda, and we had a short chat."

"How long did he stay?"

"Until about ten."

"You're certain of the time?"

"I remember the clock on my mantelpiece striking the hour soon after he left."

"Did you accompany him to the door?"

"No, we artists aren't so ceremonious, and in any case Mr. Gollen was not a particular friend of mine. I hadn't invited him in. Then I took up my book again."

"Mr. Gollen left at once?"

"I suppose so. I heard the outer door shut to."

"Now I want you to attend to this point very closely. You say that Mr. Gollen left before 10 o'clock. But the evidence given by Mrs. Parker puts the time she heard footsteps going down stairs at between 10:30

and 10:45. Mr. Gollen has stated in evidence that he came to see you after he had called in on Stokes at 9:30, that he left your rooms after 10:30, that he took a cab and reached his club by 11 o'clock, and that he stayed there playing bridge until after 4 A.M. You are quite positive that he left you before 10 o'clock?"

"Absolutely positive. The clock struck ten after he went—that I swear to. Mrs. Parker must have been mistaken."

"What did you do after he left?"

"I began to read again. But I felt tired, and I must have dropped asleep over my book."

"When did you wake again?"

"Some time in the small hours. My fire was down to a few dull cinders. Then I got up from my armchair, feeling a bit dazed, as one does in those circumstances, and went to bed in the next room."

"You were in the same chair?"

"The same chair. My book had dropped on the floor. I had never left the chair."

"You never went out on the parapet, to your knowledge?"

"Never, never!" the young man cried out, turning an appealing face to the jury. "To my knowledge, I never stirred from the armchair! Oh, believe me, I never went to murder Stokes! Why should I do such a thing? In Heaven's name, why? What motive would I have?" His voice rang throughout the court—the cry of a hunted animal.

Hatchard, K. C., mentally patted himself on the back for having stirred up his client to this outburst,

which was bound to have a sentimental effect on the jury. In his heart of hearts, he believed that Neil Lane had murdered the other man in a fit of jealous passion, but it is no business of the advocate to wear his heart upon his sleeve.

The Judge intervened with grave impartiality.

"You must answer your counsel's questions," he told the young man, "and leave it to him to make the appeal to the jury."

Hatchard resumed the examination-in-chief on lines which he had decided upon as the only practicable defence. In his final speech he intended to admit frankly that the roof and parapet markings were Neil Lane's, and to urge on the jury with all the suggestive power of which he was such a master that the young fellow, walking in his sleep in his slippers and dressing-gown, had wandered over to the other man's studio and back, but that the actual murder had been committed by some person unknown.

So he sought to draw out from Lane that he was prone to the "brown study" habit, and that, in all probability, he was an occasional somnambulist. The young man eagerly gave affirmative answers to the former line of questioning, and detailed examples of his absent-mindedness, but he was doubtful about the sleep-walking. No one had ever told him about it, and of course he could have no knowledge of it himself. He could only say that it was very probable, which the Judge pointed out was not evidence.

"You had no dreams on the night of the murder while you were asleep by your fire?" pursued counsel.

Lane put his hands to his forehead, and thought deeply.

"No," he answered after a pause. "No, I can't remember anything. I was just asleep in the ordinary way. There may have been dreams, but I don't recollect any."

The leader for the Crown, Garside—keen, polished, hard as glittering steel—rose to cross-examine.

"As to motive, had you no grudge against the deceased?"

Lane flushed perceptibly. "He was not a particular friend of mine, of course, but I hadn't any actual *grudge* against him."

"I put it to you that your affections and his were centred on the same young lady, and that her preference lay in his direction."

"That's true, of course, but it doesn't mean what you imply."

"I put it to you that heated words had passed between you on the subject."

The young man clenched his hands impotently.

"Oh, be fair to me! I admit we had a few words on the matter, but that's utterly different from creeping into a man's rooms at dead of night and murdering him in cold blood!"

"That is a matter for the jury to decide," answered the prosecuting counsel coldly. Then he continued with his merciless probing. "You had threatened to kick the deceased out of your mutual artists' club on one occasion?"

"He had been publicly talking of the lady, I don't

want to mention her name, in a way no man with any decent feeling could stand, and naturally I resented it."

"Precisely. You felt you had a claim on her affections."

"No, not a claim, though certainly I had some encouragement. But for that matter there were others who had a deep admiration for her as well as myself—Gollen for one."

"The point is immaterial. Now, to take up a different matter. When Mr. Gollen was in your rooms that evening, you gave him a whisky-and-soda?"

"Yes."

"Did you drink yourself?"

"As a matter of civility, yes. But I only had a small drop of whisky."

"Was the whisky left within your reach after he had gone?"

"I suppose so, but I never touched it again. I expect I was too tired or too lazy to put it away. But really I didn't take more than one small glass."

"Have you never taken more than one small glass of an evening?"

"I wasn't drunk, if you mean that!" answered Lane indignantly.

The Judge interposed gravely:

"You must answer counsel's question."

"Well, yes, I suppose I have, occasionally—when there has been a jollification on."

"Then there was nothing to prevent you taking more than one glass on the night of the murder?"

"I tell you I didn't!"

"Is it your habit to fall asleep in your armchair?"

"Oh, no. Sometimes I get into a brown study, but I don't fall asleep in my chair and stop there till the small hours of the morning. I don't know why I did on the night of the murder. Heaven knows I wish I had gone out on the bust, or something, so that I could prove an alibi."

"You admit that you sometimes 'go out on the bust,' as you term it?"

"I don't admit it at all!" Lane, deadly pale, was beginning to contradict himself, and Garside, K. C., gave a significant look towards the jury. Feeling was turning against the prisoner once more—to the facts of the case had been added the probable motive and igniting spark.

"When you have 'gone out on the bust,' I take it that you have come home the worse for liquor?"

Hatchard jumped up instantly:

"M'lord, I object to that question!"

The Judge allowed his objection, but an impression had been created in the minds of the jury which no formal ruling-out could efface.

Garside adjusted his glasses before making his final merciless stab. Pointing dramatically at the prisoner with outstretched finger, he demanded:

"Tell us now why, if you were not the worse for liquor on the night of the murder—why you scorched the left-hand side of your dressing-gown by the dead man's fire as you stood silently by his couch looking down upon him with the sword ready to thrust?"

A shiver went through the court at the picture conjured up by the advocate's grim words.

Then a warder hastened forward to the prisoner's side; he had fainted.

From the body of the court a man in a long fur coat, with grave, dark eyes and silvery hair, moved swiftly towards the witness box.

"I am a doctor," he said. "My name is Wycherley. Can I be of assistance?"

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The speeches for the defence and for the prosecution had been made: on the one hand eloquent, impassioned, appealing to the heart; and on the other hand cold, hard, mercilessly logical, appealing to the intellect. The Judge had given his summing-up, clear-cut and instinct with the impartiality of British justice, but pointing out emphatically that no shred of evidence had been adduced by the defence to place the murder on to another man's shoulders.

When the jury filed back slowly and gravely into their box after the long wait, everyone in court could see the verdict in their faces. The prisoner went white at his first sight of them.

"What is your verdict, gentlemen—guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, my lord; but we strongly recommend him to mercy."

The chaplain moved to the Judge's side. The clerk of arraigns stood up and pronounced the solemn, formal question:

"Prisoner at the bar, have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you?"

Neil Lane squared his shoulders and looked the Judge in the face, eye to eye, as man to man.

"My lord," said he, and his voice rang through the court and into men's hearts, "I ask for no 'mercy' of the usual kind. I am innocent, but I would far rather hang by the neck till I am dead than endure the hell of penal servitude for life. As you will one day stand before your God, my lord, be merciful and give me death!"

The Judge took up the black cap placed by his desk.

CHAPTER V

THE ERRAND OF DEATH

DURING the days that followed Neil Lane's conviction there were curious rumours current in legal and newspaper circles. Naturally the defence had lodged a formal appeal, and the rumours took the shape that some new and wholly unexpected evidence would be brought before the Judges of the Appeal Court when the case came up for hearing after the customary fortnight.

As with the breed of rumours, they assumed most explicit and circumstantial form as they passed from mouth to mouth. The actual murder had been the work of a woman, a jealous mistress. Lane had seen her in the dead man's studio on the fateful night, and was shielding her by his silence. Stricken with remorse, she had made a confession to her priest, whose religion forbade him to make known her identity. But the police were on her track. And so forth.

The real basis of these fantastic stories lay with Dr. Xavier Wycherley. He had attended the court in pursuit of his life-study, the human mind, the psychological springs of action, but in the course of the trial overwhelming conviction had come upon him of the innocence of Neil Lane. As a humanitarian, he felt im-

pelled to do what lay within his power for the young man.

He was now endeavouring to persuade the Judges of the Appeal Court to step outside the grooves of British justice and create a precedent of a kind that struck the legal mind with horror. Thoroughly convinced himself of the young man's innocence, he had first to carry his conviction into the minds of the two opposing counsel, and then to arrange an interview of a most unprecedented and entirely unofficial nature in the chambers of the Master of the Rolls.

Only his intense conviction, his magnetic personality, and his European reputation had made such an interview possible for a moment.

Lord Thorndyke paced his hearthrug uneasily when he had listened to the doctor's astonishing theory of the crime. The two counsel, Hatchard and Garside, sat silent, with faces composed to legal inscrutability.

"But even granted that your theory were correct, Doctor," Lord Thorndyke was saying, "how would that help matters? The law cannot take cognisance of the action of one human mind on another. If we once admitted such action, we should be plunged back in the old days of witchcraft and the legal horrors of the Middle Ages. Suppose that you could even *bring evidence* of a kind that gave colour to your supposition —what follows? This man, Neil Lane, with an admitted jealousy towards the murdered artist, is stirred up to action in the hypnotic state, and climbs over the roof to kill in actuality the man whom in the ordinary way he would only have killed in thought. But the law can

only deal with the facts of the case; the psychological springs of action are outside its purview, except in so far as they mitigate punishment. The law says that he who kills must suffer the penalty of the law, whether he kills in rage and passion, or in cold blood, or under the stimulus of another."

Dr. Wycherley concentrated his keen, penetrating gaze on the finely chiselled face of the old jurist. His voice was low and even, but intense in its sincerity.

"Suppose," he replied, "that Neil Lane had no intention of killing—did not kill?"

"The jury found otherwise."

"The jury could only deal with the facts before them. Grant me this experiment, and who can tell what utterly unsuspected fact might not be brought to light? You, men of the law, have had a lifelong training in the marshalling and judging of the seen and the tangible. I, on the other hand, have had a lifelong training in the judging of the unseen and the intangible.

"I say this, with my reputation at stake, that there are unsuspected factors in the case that, so far, have not been touched by the counsel for the defence and prosecution, anxious as both of them are that justice shall be done. I *know*, as surely as I know that I live, there is that to bring to light which only experiment can give us. Lord Thorndyke, I ask only for an entirely unofficial experiment. Whatever its results may be, their bearing and interpretation will be left unquestioningly in the hands of yourself and your colleagues on the bench. In the name of justice and humanity, I ask for this. It may mean a man's life."

The Master of the Rolls paced up and down in silence, his forehead furrowed in thought. When at length he spoke it was to the counsel for the defence.

"Have I your assurance," he asked, "that the experiment will not be made public, or used for any purpose without the express consent of myself and my colleagues?"

"Certainly, m'lord. We are all agreed upon that essential. On no account must a precedent be created."

"Then," said the old jurist thoughtfully, "I will put the matter before my colleagues."

* * * * * * *

Dr. Wycherley had gained his point. The experiment had been sanctioned.

Singly and in perfect secrecy, so as to keep the matter away from the avid newspapers, the several participants in the coming proceedings had gathered together in Neil Lane's studio—the Master of the Rolls, the two counsel, an independent medical specialist, the prisoner and a Scotland Yard man in charge of him, and Dr. Wycherley. Round the studio buildings had been posted plainclothes men to prevent any interruption on the one hand, or any attempt at escape on the other.

It was ten o'clock in the evening. Everything had been arranged to repeat the conditions of the night of the murder. Sitting by his studio-fire, in his old armchair, with his old dressing-gown and his slippers on, sat Neil Lane, studying Duchesne's "History of the Flemish School." A single shaded reading-lamp by his

side lit up his book; in the outer darkness of the room sat the spectators, in agreement to keep perfect silence and allow Dr. Wycherley's experiment the fairest possible test.

In the studio of the murdered man, in the neighbouring house, a fire blazed and a dummy form lay stretched upon the couch.

For a full hour they allowed the condemned man to read on, so as to let the environment soak into his spirit once more and prepare the mind for the hypnotic operation. Dr. Wycherley, sitting in the outer darkness, had been spending the waiting moments in making his delicate little left-hand miniatures of Lane, of Lord Thorndyke and of the two counsel, drawn from his memory of the scene in court. These would afterwards be filed away amongst the records of his cases. Now the mental healer moved forward to a place by Neil's side, and asked him to fix his gaze and his full powers of concentration on himself. It was highly necessary for the experiment that the patient should be sent into deep hypnosis, and accordingly Dr. Wycherley put aside his usual methods of verbal suggestion, and employed with all the power at his command the intensive gaze and the slow hypnotic passes of the older school of mesmerists.

In half an hour Neil's eyes had closed, and his arm stood out rigidly when Dr. Wycherley raised it to a horizontal position. The medical witness came forward with the jurists, and made the usual needle insertions in the arm and the light flashes into the eyes, so as to

test the depth of the hypnosis. With a curt nod the specialist expressed his satisfaction at the tests.

Dr. Wycherley put his hand on the sleeping man's forehead.

"It is ten o'clock on the night of the murder. Tell me all that happened after that."

It was a strange, mechanical, far-away voice that replied to him from the body of Neil Lane:

"I take up my book and begin to read again. Presently my thoughts wander, and I fall into a brown study. Somehow I seem to feel in a vague way that a man has entered the room and is standing silently by my side. I do not feel it with my mind, but in a kind of unconscious way. I know that he is making passes over me, but yet I am not sufficiently awake to resist him. Now I seem to feel myself falling under the power of his mind—it is as though his mind were entering into my brain and taking possession of it, side by side with my own mind."

"Do you know who the man is?"

"Now I know that he is Gollen."

"Does he speak to you?"

"Yes; he tells me to obey him, and have no fear. He tells me to stand up, and I do so. He tells me to turn out my lamp, and I do so. Now he tells me that at midnight I am to climb over the roof to Stokes' studio, and kill him. I am horrified at the idea, and I try to resist his suggestion. I tell him that I would never do such a thing."

"What happens then?"

"He tells me that he was only joking, and that I

ought to laugh at the joke. I believe him, so I laugh. Now he tells me that Stokes is very ill, and is lying down on his couch by the studio-fire. Unless he is tended he will become worse, and the fault will be mine. I feel sorry for Stokes. Now Gollen tells me that I ought to go at midnight and tend him. I reply that I will go. He gives me detailed instructions as to what I am to do, and leaves me."

"What is the time?"

"It is just after 10:30."

"Do you see this clock on the mantelpiece?"

With closed eyes the young man turned his head towards the mantelpiece, and replied:

"I see it."

"When it strikes midnight you will do exactly as you did on the night of the murder."

"I will do so."

The reading-lamp began to waver and flutter, and, with a gasp, went out. The room was plunged into darkness, except for the eerie flickering of the firelight which showed the watchers dimly to one another. They kept a strained silence whilst the clock ticked its weary way to midnight.

As twelve o'clock struck the sleeping figure in the armchair rose up, and with sightless eyes began to move quickly to the window leading out to the parapet. The Scotland Yard detective responsible for the safety of the condemned man kept close behind him, ready to catch him should he slip on the parapet or roof.

In a whisper Dr. Wycherley suggested to the others that they should go round to the dead man's studio by

the usual entrance. As they arrived hurriedly there was a noise heard on the roof, and Neil Lane made his way in by the skylight.

He came to the middle of the room and stared about him with sightless eyes. The watchers shivered at the uncanny deftness of this ghostlike shell of a man with his automaton mind.

"Who is in the room?" asks Dr. Wycherley.

"Stokes."

"Where is he?"

"Gollen told me that he is lying down on his couch by the fire."

"Is there no one else in the room?"

"No one else."

Lord Thorndyke flicked thumb and fore-finger lightly together—a mannerism of his denoting that things were turning out much as he expected. But Neil Lane apparently did not hear him or know that there were watchers of his movements. He went over to the fire, and then moved near to it a small table holding a bottle of brandy, glasses, and a packet of quinine powder.

"Why are you moving the table?" asked Dr. Wycherley at this unexpected action.

The even, mechanical voice of the sleeping man answered him: "Because Gollen told me that Stokes had moved his couch to where the fireplace used to be, and the fireplace to where the couch used to be. . . ."

Lord Thorndyke drew in his breath sharply and moved involuntarily forward.

". . . And so I am taking the table nearer to

Stokes' couch in case he were to wake up in the night and want medicine or drink."

Neil Lane went to the wall and placed his hand on a narrow, vicious-looking thrusting sword hanging with some other Eastern trophies.

"What are you doing now?"

"Gollen told me that I would find the poker hanging on the wall. I am to take it down and poke the fire into a big blaze, so that the sick man may have warmth."

The sleeping man took down the sword, handling it as if it were indeed a poker, and started to thrust it vigorously again and again into the dummy form lying on the couch.

"What are you doing now?"

"I am poking the fire into a blaze, as Gollen told me to do. That will make Stokes comfortable for the night, so now I can go back to my rooms."

Placing the sword upon the ground, nearly parallel with the couch, as though he were laying it on a fender, Neil Lane moved across to the skylight and began to climb out, still with sightless eyes.

Lord Thorndyke whispered to Dr. Wycherley: "On the morning the murder was discovered the sword was also found lying parallel to the couch. It was an extraordinary detail."

"And such details are evidence of the highest value," answered the doctor. "In thinking over what you have seen to-night, I would ask you particularly to realise this fact of mental science: that no man or woman can be influenced in a single hypnotic trance to do

what is contrary to his or her moral sense. This man Gollen must have been aware of the fact. He made no persistent attempt, judging from what we have seen to-night, to induce young Lane to murder Stokes. He avoided that by a subterfuge. He sent Lane on an errand of death which was ostensibly an errand of mercy."

"I realise that," was the reply of Lord Thorndyke, as he stood looking at the scene of the murder with thoughtful eyes. "I fully realise that. But the legal question raised is one which requires the gravest consideration. To admit as evidence what we have seen to-night would create a most dangerous precedent. I will confess to you that at the moment I cannot see what I am to do in the matter, unless it is contrived to alter Lane's sentence to one of penal servitude."

"An innocent man!"

"It is a tangle apparently without a reasonable solution," mused the Master of the Rolls.

Dr. Wycherley said no more, judging it best to leave the affair to the large-minded sympathies of the jurist.

But the morning brought a most unexpected solution to the problem, cutting clean the Gordian knot. Breaking through his usual rule by glancing at a daily newspaper, Dr. Wycherley's eye was caught by an item of exceptional interest. A brief paragraph told that one of the chief witnesses in the Neil Lane case, a Mr. Gollen, had been dangerously injured in a taxi-cab accident while driving to Charing Cross Station to catch a Continental express. He was now lying in Charing

Cross Hospital, and his condition was considered extremely grave.

At once the doctor left his breakfast untouched and hurried off to the hospital. Pleading matters of the utmost urgency, he asked the house-surgeon in charge for a brief private interview with the dying man.

Gollen, swathed in bandages, greeted Dr. Wycherley with a cynical smile. "Another of you specialists?" he enquired banteringly. "You're all no use; I know that quite well. My number's up. But don't imagine for a moment that I'm afraid of death."

Dr. Wycherley gazed at him with his keen, earnest look, and answered very quietly: "Few men are afraid of death—only of the life after death."

Gollen, suddenly sobered, nodded his head in agreement, but then added: "I'm not a 'religious' man. I don't believe in your heaven or hell."

"Is it your belief that the ego will live on after death?"

"That I do believe. It's only my earthly body that I am going to shed."

"Then are you not afraid of meeting Neil Lane in the life hereafter?"

"Neil Lane—what the devil do you mean?" blustered the dying man.

"My poor fellow," answered Dr. Wycherley with a note of real pity in his voice, "I know all that you have been trying to conceal. No one can touch you now; the law is impotent. But will you choose to go to your new life with a double crime shackled to your soul—first Stokes, and now that poor boy who stood

in the dock to receive his death sentence for the crime he had never dreamt of committing."

"Stokes deserved all he got and more!" was the bitter answer. "I knew him in the East, and he was a *devil*. He gave me full cause. Yes; he was better out of the world."

"But Neil Lane! What harm did Neil Lane do to you? Can you bear to face him in the hereafter? When you have fled to the uttermost ends of space, and he pursues you still—out in the black void where no star gleams, beyond where the comets wheel on their courses—when his soul and yours come face to face, what will you say to him?"

The dying man kept silence while the clock ticked through a full minute. Then he turned to the doctor and said: "I suppose you want me to sign a confession?"

"Yes; for your own sake as much as for Neil Lane's."

"Well, perhaps you are right. Bring me pen and paper."

With a firm hand he wrote a few lines, and placed below them a signature of characteristic decisiveness.

The true story of the murder of Stokes was never made public in court—the hypnotic experiment was too dangerous a legal precedent to be published at large. But at the Court of Appeal it was put in evidence that Gollen had signed a death-bed confession of guilt; and in due course the announcement was made that his Majesty the King had been graciously pleased to extend a free pardon to Neil Lane.

CHAPTER VI

A ROYAL COMMAND

HOME with Dr. Wycherley was always the island and his beloved garden. Next after the study of mind he loved trees—looked upon them almost as his children. The wonderful collection of trees and shrubs on Isola Salvatore was a never-ending source of delight and pride to him.

At the moment when the call to Pfalzburg reached him, the doctor was just preparing to plant in the garden of spices a consignment of seedlings from Celebes with the minute care they demanded. He had been looking forward to the arrival and planting of the newcomers with the keenest pleasure. But there was grave urgency behind the cold formality of this royal call, and so he must needs put the anticipated pleasure aside and leave his new children to the care of his gardener.

In translation, this was the message brought to Dr. Wycherley by a young officer of the royal household:

PFALZBURG, May 20, 19—

I am commanded by His Majesty the King to request your presence at the earliest possible moment at the Palace of Pfalzburg. His Majesty desires to consult you.

Von Olmütz
(Chancellor of the Kingdom of Varovia.)

The young officer who had conveyed the message to Isola Salvatore now sat in a chair, considering, with a slight frown, the polish of his boots. The dust of travel was upon them, and it seemed to irk him.

Dr. Wycherley, reluctantly deciding to leave the engrossing occupation of cradling the new seedlings, asked of him: "Do you know how the trains run?"

With military precision the young lieutenant drew out his pocket-book and read in formal, precise tones: "Train from Rovellasco to Brescia at 4:10. Change at Brescia into Milan-Venice train de luxe. Change at Verona into Munich wagon-lit. Change at Munich into Dresden train de luxe. Change at Dresden into Pfalzburg express. Wires ready to send to stationmaster at Milan, Verona, Munich and Dresden to reserve special compartments. Dinner on the Munich train; breakfast at Munich; lunch on Dresden train." He closed the book and returned it to his pocket.

Dr. Wycherley felt urged to stick a mental pin into this very precise young man. Accordingly he asked: "Isn't there one point you have overlooked?"

"So?"

"Our local trains to Brescia are uncertain. We might miss the connection."

The officer gravely drew out his pocket-book again and read: "Emergency wire to stationmaster at Brescia to prepare special train for Verona. Emergency wire to divisional superintendent at Verona to clear the line for special train for Munich." He returned the book to his pocket.

"But that would leave us without dinner anywhere."

Food was a matter Dr. Wycherley gave no concern to; he was merely testing this very precise young man.

For the third time the young officer took out his pocket-book.

"Emergency wire to Hotel Porta Nuova at Verona. Make up best possible dinner for two, and put on special train for Munich."

Dr. Wycherley acknowledged defeat with a smile.

"That is the way Von Moltke won his battles."

The young lieutenant took the compliment with the slightest change of expression, and replied: "Naturally one is always prepared."

But on the long journey to Pfalzburg, Fritz von Lindenau relaxed a little and told the doctor much that he wanted to know of the King Sigmund V's family history, together with his own hopes and ambitions and such of his love affairs as could be related without extensive editing.

Two points von Lindenau had impressed on Dr. Wycherley as being of special importance. The one was that the King desired absolute secrecy, and that it would be advisable for the doctor to pass under another name at Pfalzburg. The second, that the King was quick-tempered and irritable—just as his father, Sigmund IV, had been—and that it would be advisable to humour his caprices. "They are a queer family," commented the young officer, with the familiarity born of his knowledge of Court.

They did not proceed to the central terminus at Pfalzburg, but alighted at Pfalzburg West and drove in a closed carriage to the palace, which is perched high

above the city. Without delay, Dr. Wycherley was introduced into the King's private cabinet.

Sigmund V was a man of about forty-five, somewhat small and wizened when seen at close quarters. His official portraits, taken on occasions of State ceremony, decidedly flattered him. His forehead, viewed without the covering of the eagled helmet, was narrow and receding, and his eyes were ferrety. Further, there was a nervous twitching of the scalp during conversation which was highly unpleasant.

"Sit down, sit down, Dr. Wycherley," said the King in rapid German. "I thought von Olmütz would have met you at the station. You must have missed one another, missed one another. Hope you had a good journey." Then, without waiting for any reply to this perfunctory remark: "I sent for you in the first place because I don't trust any of these Pfalzburg specialists; in the second place, because this is a matter on which I want absolute secrecy. You understand, you understand?"

"Your Majesty can rely on my entire discretion."

"It's more than that, more than that. I don't want anybody to know that you have even been called in to advise. No advertisement out of this, you understand, you understand?"

Sigmund V had never been renowned for his tact. Such a remark, to a man of Dr. Wycherley's temperament—a man who neither sought notoriety nor valued it one jot—was almost an insult. But the doctor replied courteously:

"You need have no fear, sir. Whether I take up

this case or not, the matter will remain entirely secret with me."

The King raised his eyebrows at Dr. Wycherley's suggestion that he might not take up the case, but there was only a grave seriousness in the doctor's steady gaze. So he continued:

"You know, of course, that my only son, the Crown Prince Karel, is affianced to the Grand Duchess Irma of Weissenrode-Hohenstein. The marriage is to take place in three days, in three days. A very suitable alliance, very suitable in every way. Politically it is vital to the well-being of Varovia. My son and the Grand Duchess are in love with one another, and so everything is plain sailing, plain sailing."

"And what are the objections he has suddenly developed?"

"I didn't say he had any objections. Morbid fancies—that's all they are, morbid fancies." The King's scalp twitched angrily. "So I want you to talk to him, and reason him out of them. It's a matter of the utmost importance to get this nonsense out of his head. That's why I sent for you. Heard of your powers, heard of your powers."

"Is the Crown Prince willing to see me on the matter? The point is important."

"Quite willing, quite willing. No difficulty on that score. In fact, the whole matter is perfectly simple if it's approached in the right way. . . . Of course you must handle him tactfully," added the tactless King.

It was abundantly clear to Dr. Wycherley that any difference of opinion between father and son could eas-

ily be widened out into a definite breach. But they would hardly call in a doctor from half across Europe merely to smooth over a family quarrel. Matters must be more serious than the King's words implied.

"When can I see the Crown Prince?" asked Dr. Wycherley.

"Now, of course. No time to lose, no time to lose." He pressed an electric bell. "Lieutenant von Lindenau will show you to my son's study. It's all arranged; he's waiting for you. It's vital for the welfare of the kingdom that this morbid nonsense should be reasoned out of him. But it's got to be done tactfully. By the way, your name in Pfalzburg will be Herr Muller. You understand, you understand?"

The Crown Prince rose from his study armchair to greet Dr. Wycherley. Between father and son there was a striking contrast. Prince Karel was tall and well-built, and his features were moulded on stronger lines than his father's. Altogether there was a breadth of thought behind the boy which was lacking in the King. But the point which riveted Dr. Wycherley's attention were the eyes, deep-set and with a haunting melancholy in them. While the body was the body of an athlete, the mind was the mind of a dreamer.

He spoke in excellent English—accounted for by the souvenirs of Balliol which hung on the walls of his study side by side with the souvenirs of Bonn—and with a voice very pleasant to the ear.

"It was good of you to make this long journey on my account at such short notice," he said as he shook

hands. "Did Fritzi look after your comforts properly?"

"He is a model organiser," answered Dr. Wycherley, smilingly. "If he should be lucky enough to get into a war, he will go far. Put him in control of railway transport, your Royal Highness."

"Yes, Fritzi is a good fellow, and cleverer than most people think. Did he tell you much about myself?"

"Only what is to your credit. Now I see that he suppressed little."

Prince Karel shook his head smilingly in depreciation of the compliment. Then his eyes grew grave again, and he replied, with a deep sadness in his voice: "That little is vital."

"Tell me what is troubling you."

"I fear there is no help that you—or any medical man—can give, but my father insisted on having your professional advice."

"Perhaps the matter is less vital than you think. You have been brooding deeply over it. That is always liable to make the little loom large. Will your Royal Highness give me your hand, so that I may sense the radical or the trivial of your trouble?"

The Prince extended his hand, and Dr. Wycherley took it in his own cool, firm grasp. For many moments he continued to hold it, while he looked deep into the eyes of Prince Karel. At length he said, very gravely:

"What grounds have you for supposing it?"

"Ah, you have guessed?"

"I have sensed."

"The very strongest of grounds—what lies hidden in myself. Ever since I was a boy I have been subject to long fits of melancholy—times when I felt that I would like to slip out of this world of mine and bury myself in a hermit's cell. But during the last twelve months the feeling has slowly changed to another and a very terrible one. When the fits come upon me, I now feel an unaccountable rage stealing inside my brain and gaining possession of my mind. Heaven knows I have struggled against it, but I seem powerless to control the impulse. I see red; I strike out blindly in my rage; I scarcely know what I do! When I have felt this evil obsession coming upon me, I have asked Fritzi to stand by me and see that no harm happens. He's a good fellow, Fritzi, and he has stood by me. Except my father and the Chancellor, no one else but Fritzi knows. I sometimes wonder if the others suspect . . .

"Last week he was called away, and when he was absent a fit of this strange, sudden anger came upon me. I was alone in his study with my favourite dog. . . . When I had recovered my senses the dog was lying on the hearthrug—there, there!—with his head smashed in! The poker was red with blood!" He shuddered at the recollection. "My poor, faithful dog—I can't bear to think of it!"

"When you became engaged to the Grand Duchess . . ."

"I didn't know then what I know now. It is only lately that I have realised it to the full. At that time I used to think that the fits of melancholy had no

special significance. But now I know, and the knowledge is burning into me like vitriol! I love her, Dr. Wycherley, I love her passionately! I wouldn't have harm or sorrow come to her for the world! Oh, God, what am I to do—what am I to do?"

"There are many cases such as yours which have yielded to psychotherapeutic treatment," answered Dr. Wycherley, with deep sympathy in his voice. "Time is required, naturally, and it would not be difficult to arrange that an accident—say, a broken leg—should confine you to your room and postpone the marriage. In a couple of months' time I could give you a more definite opinion. Without wishing to raise false hopes in you, I will say that there is decidedly the possibility of complete cure. Where there is no strong family taint . . ."

The young Prince had been listening to Dr. Wycherley's kindly words with hope dawning in his eyes, but at the last sentence he interrupted fiercely with: "Wait till you hear the worst! You know of my grandfather's death?"

"I know, of course, that King Sigmund IV died of acute scarlet fever, and that he lies buried in the family tomb here in Pfalzburg."

"A dummy form lies buried there. My grandfather is alive!"

"But——"

"Alive and a raving madman! No one knew but the doctor who attended him, now dead, and his keepers," continued the Prince rapidly. "The secret has been well guarded. Four days ago I discovered

it by the merest accident. I was out hunting in a distant part of the forest at one of our country estates; I became separated from the others and lost my bearings. At nightfall I came to a forester's hut and entered it to get refreshment and ask my way. For some reason the people of the house were away at the moment, and I unlocked a door in order to find food. As I struck a match in that dark room, the light fell on a man, with a long grey beard, chained down on to a bed. It was my grandfather! It was six years since I had last seen him, but it was he—that I will swear to!" He covered his face with his hands to shut out the horrible vision he had conjured up.

"Is there no possibility that your Royal Highness was mistaken?"

"My father denies it; they all deny it. But it was *he*—he called me by a pet name that my grandfather had used for me when I was a little child . . . I quite recognise the political necessity of keeping his madness secret and pretending his death. We have not been a popular dynasty, and the Socialist Party has been growing very powerful in Varovia. If it had been known that Sigmund IV was not merely eccentric, but actually insane, there would have been a revolution. Of course, I would not be telling of this unless I had absolute confidence in your discretion."

"All that you tell me will be absolutely safe with me. But, once again, there is no possibility of a mistake?"

"None whatever. . . . I believe the keeping of that ghastly secret killed my mother. . . . Now you can

realise my feelings, with my marriage only a few days distant. On the one hand the duty to my dynasty and my country; on the other hand the duty to the woman I love and the children that may be ours. Tell me, Doctor, which duty is the greater?"

Dr. Wycherley turned to the window and looked out over the red roofs and the fretted spires of Pfalzburg for some moments before answering. Then he said slowly: "The marriage must not take place."

The young Prince replied sadly: "Ah, you tell me what my own conscience also tells me!"

"Your Royal Highness will be able to do your duty by your country without marrying the Grand Duchess. Under treatment, that unfortunate tendency you speak of may probably be eliminated—certainly kept in check. I see no reason why you may not be, when the time comes, the best king that Varovia has ever had."

"And the succession?"

"That consideration must be put aside for the present."

"But what am I to say to the woman I love? The truth will break her heart."

"I fear I cannot advise in that. You will know her feelings far better than I."

Prince Karel rose from his chair with a steady determination in his eyes. "I thank you, Dr. Wycherley—I thank you sincerely. I know you have been summoned here to persuade me into a marriage from which my conscience revolts. As *you* have done your higher duty, so will I do mine. Let us come to my father and tell him."

CHAPTER VII

THE DECISION

WITH the King was the Chancellor, von Olmütz, a man of sixty—stout, bland, smiling, outwardly the personification of easy good nature. Someone in speaking of him to Bismarck had used the epithet "oily." Bismarck's reply had come curt and to the point: "Oiled steel!" For twenty years von Olmütz had stood behind the throne of Varovia and moved the hands and lips of its kings.

Introduced to the doctor, he greeted him with a well-turned compliment: "When his Majesty asked me a few days ago who was the foremost mental healer in Europe, I replied: 'The founder of the *Annalen der Psychologischen Forschungen*, Dr. Xavier Wycherley.' Permit me, Herr Doctor, to tell you how much I value the copies of your journal I have been able to obtain. Perhaps one day you will be so kind as to complete the gaps in my series?"

Dr. Wycherley bowed and replied: "With pleasure. But you will have more to teach me than I you. I confess to coveting the knowledge of men and women that thirty years of diplomacy have given you."

The Chancellor continued blandly: "I had hoped to give myself the pleasure of meeting you on your

arrival at Pfalzburg. But apparently our young friend von Lindenau made a stupid mistake in descending at the station of Pfalzburg West. I was, of course, awaiting you at the terminus. You will excuse my apparent discourtesy, Herr Doctor?"

Dr. Wycherley bowed again. Inwardly he was reflecting that the young lieutenant was hardly the man to make stupid mistakes. No doubt he had wanted the doctor to avoid seeing the Chancellor before he had seen the Crown Prince.

Prince Karel brought the conversation sharply to the point at issue: "Dr. Wycherley has meanwhile been enquiring into my case, and he agrees with the conclusion I had arrived at."

The King's scalp twitched angrily.

"What's that, what's that?" he cried, and turned on Dr. Wycherley: "Didn't I tell you plainly that my son's ideas were only morbid nonsense? Your business is to cure, isn't it, isn't it?"

"Where cure is possible, your Majesty."

"As it is here!"

"If sufficient time is allowed, there are good hopes of permanent cure. But marriage must be put aside for some years at least." He spoke quietly but decisively.

"The marriage is arranged for Thursday. It must take place on Thursday! To-morrow the Grand Duchess makes her State entry into the city, into the city!"

The Chancellor interposed smoothly: "The Herr Doctor's examination of the Crown Prince has neces-

sarily been very brief. He will probably desire to look into matters in greater detail before giving his final decision. There are many important aspects that possibly have not yet been brought to his notice."

But Dr. Wycherley ignored the golden bridge that was offered for his retreat. "Your Excellency," he said, "will know that I am not the man to make hasty decisions. My professional advice has been asked, and it is this: that all thoughts of marriage be put aside for some years at least."

Prince Karel added: "That is what my own conscience tells me also."

"And what of your duty to your father?" asked the King. His little, ferrety eyes shot murderous glances at the mental healer. "Isn't it your duty to obey his wishes, to obey his wishes?"

"There are other duties too, father."

The Chancellor moved quickly to interpose between father and son.

"Permit me to explain, sir. I do not think that the Crown Prince thoroughly realises all the aspects of this matter. I have the very deepest sympathy with his scruples of conscience—they do honour to him. But I believe that they blind him to the very serious position in which his proposed action would place us. I have here a report from the Chief of Police." He drew out a folded paper from his pocket, and tapped it significantly as he fixed Prince Karel with his eye. "He tells me that the announcement of the alliance with the Grand Duchess has had a distinctly quieting effect upon the people, and that it has given the Royal

Family more popularity—I speak plain words, because the situation demands plain words—more popularity than for many years past. The Socialist element has received a decided set-back. But were this marriage to be cancelled, it is my deep belief—based on a lifetime's knowledge of the people of Varovia—that the political consequences would be *disastrous*. For my part I could only ask that my resignation of the Chancellorship be accepted and that I be permitted to retire and spend my old age in some quieter land."

"You hear that, you hear that?" added King Sigmund to his son.

"The police department wants re-organising," replied the Prince, his lips white and tense.

"So much for internal affairs," pursued the Chancellor relentlessly. "Now for the external aspect. The Weissenrode-Hohensteins are financially of small importance, but through their relationship to most of the Royal Families of Europe the alliance is vital to the political existence of Varovia as an independent kingdom. Is your Royal Highness prepared to see your father degraded to the standing of a mediatised prince? Look at those portraits on the walls surrounding you—Sigmund the Great, Rudolph, Sigmund II, victor at the bloody field of Szczapanacs—what would they think of their descendant who betrayed his dynasty?"

Involuntarily Prince Karel looked up at the grave faces that all had their eyes—or so it seemed—turned upon him. "But our relations with foreign Powers are now friendly?" he argued.

"To outward appearance, yes. In reality—" von Olmütz paused significantly.

With renewed vehemence he went on: "So far we have looked at Varovia's claims upon you—now let us look at the claims of the noble lady who has given you her heart. Are we to send the Grand Duchess back to her country jilted upon her wedding-day—disgraced in the eyes of all her people—a byword in Europe? What excuse have we to offer? That our Crown Prince has wearied of her? That his affections have cooled?"

"We could tell her the truth," interrupted the Prince in a strained whisper.

"And what to her people? Are we to tell them that our Crown Prince fancies he is no fit mate for any woman? Would they believe that? No, they would look on it as the merest excuse. They would believe that Varovia had deliberately insulted the Grand Duchess Irma. Here is the Grand Duchess—" von Olmütz took up a framed photograph from the King's desk—"are you prepared to send this noble lady back to her people insulted and disgraced?

"Come," he took the Prince by the arm and hurried him to the balcony that overlooked the city of Pfalzburg. "See there the arches and the decorations your people have erected to welcome your bride to-morrow! There is the railway-station at which she will arrive. There are the streets through which you will drive to the music of the acclamations of your people. There is the cathedral at which the Archbishop will place her hand in yours and give to you a blessing on the marriage from our Holy Father the

Pope. Out there"—he flung his arm wide—"out there in the far distance is the castle of Greiffenfels where even now they prepare for your wedding-night. There you will pass the honeyed days with the noble lady who loves you passionately and is to give you all that your heart desires. Is there no blood in your veins? *Gott in Himmel!* ARE YOU ICE?"

The Crown Prince's face was flushed; his blood ran hot within him. Nervously he clasped and unclasped his hands as he stood on the balcony looking now upon the streets that were being decked for his marriage and now out to the distant horizon.

The Chancellor played his last card. "A special messenger from Weissenrode arrived with a postbag but half an hour ago. For you there is this letter"—he drew it out from his pocket—"the writing is familiar to us all. Open it and see what message your noble lady has for you!"

The young Prince clutched at the letter and kissed it rapturously. The Chancellor came quickly inside the room and said to Dr. Wycherley: "I believe I am correct in stating that the Royal Family of Varovia have no further need of your services. A pleasant journey to you, Herr Doctor!"

Dr. Wycherley bowed in silence and withdrew.

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The three days that followed that momentous interview were days packed with activity for the Crown Prince. There was the arrival of the Grand Duchess Irma at Pfalzburg, her State entry into the city, the

dinners and the receptions, the official visits and the official return visits. He had hardly time for thought until he retired to his bed at night, weary from the round of ceremonies and the multitude of pleasant nothings he had had to evolve for each of the important people who were presented to him.

Without a pause the official ceremonies carried him along with them in a breathless rush to his marriage-day. The drive to the cathedral was through a lane of acclamations from his people—right and left he bowed to acknowledge them, bowing as the actor does to a hazy sea of faces on the other side of the glaring footlights. Individual faces were lost in the sea; when he raised his hand to his helmet and smiled up at the fluttering handkerchiefs from balcony or roof, the action was quite mechanical.

It was a huge dream panorama of shoutings and cheerings, of fluttering flags and blazing uniforms, until he found himself walking slowly up the aisle of the cathedral while the solemn organ rolled out its thunderous chords and sent them echoing around the fretted tracery of the great dome. For a moment he faltered; then he looked into the eyes of his bride and his heart leapt to the joy in hers.

A splendid pair of lovers they made as they left the cathedral after the ceremony and drove back to the palace—the people of Pfalzburg were frantic in their acclamations. One of the very few in all that vast gathering who did not cheer the royal pair was Dr. Wycherley, viewing the procession from the balcony of his hotel. His heart was heavy within him at the

thought of the tragedy of the future—of the sacrifice which was being made so that the dynasty should continue in its seat of power.

Upon the woman would the weight of the tragedy fall—upon her and upon the children that might be hers.

Late that evening the Crown Prince and Princess arrived at the castle of Greiffenfels in which their honeymoon was to be spent. The servants in the castle were few. They were to have all the privacy permissible to a royal pair.

Prince Karel and his beautiful bride dined alone in the great dining-room which opens on to the terrace-walk around the battlements of Greiffenfels. They were sipping their coffee, and the attendants had discreetly withdrawn.

"Why are you looking so thoughtful and sad?" asked Irma when a long pause had ensued between them.

"I didn't mean to, Liebchen. My thoughts were wandering," returned the Prince dreamily.

"Tell me what you were thinking of?"

"I was thinking of a solitary hut in the forest of—But what am I saying? That's no matter to dwell upon." He pulled himself together and gazed at his bride with love welling into his eyes. "To-night, this hour, is the happiest of my life. Is it *your* happiest hour, Liebchen?"

Irma came to him and laid her face upon his shoulder, looking up into his eyes. "Need I say, Kärli?"

He kissed her passionately again and again, crushing her to his breast.

"Oh, you will kill me with your kisses!" she cried in mock fear, and then lovingly returned his kisses.

"Tell me once again, this is the happiest hour of your life?"

"You know it, my loved one!"

"If you had only this hour with me to look back upon, you would regret nothing?"

"What do you mean by saying such a strange thing, Kärli?" she replied, startled. "I want you with me always."

"But this hour would fill you with memories of joy?" he insisted gently.

"Yes—oh, yes!"

He rose from his chair and took out a cigarette-case from his pocket. "I would like to smoke a little on the terrace. Liebchen, you will excuse?"

"Let me come with you—the night is glorious, the stars are singing to us of joy and happiness."

"No, dear, I want this moment alone. I want to persuade myself that all this joy of mine is real. Won't you go to the piano and play for me that which I like so well, 'Star of Eve'?"

"But it is sad!"

"'The sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought,'" he quoted, with music in his voice. "Kiss me once again, my beloved, full upon the lips!"

She came to him, and he crushed her again in his arms, raining kisses upon her. With reverence in his eyes he followed her as she moved to the room adjoin-

ing to play for him the haunting melody from "Tannhäuser."

Then the Crown Prince Karel, heir to the kingdom of Varovia, left the happiness that was his and walked with firm step and clear eye to the end of the battlements where the shadows are dark.

There was a flower growing in a crevice down the wall, and he leant far over in order to pluck it.

* * * * * * *

All that evening of the wedding-day Dr. Wycherley had had a deep sense of tragedy crowding in upon him. To try to banish it from his mind he had made his way to one of the great popular cafés of Pfalzburg, where a tsigane orchestra flung out its gay melodies and the faces of the people radiated happiness.

About eleven o'clock, when he was leaving the restaurant to return to his hotel, there arose a sudden clamour in the streets that carried a very different note to the wild rejoicings of the populace. A crowd was gathering around one of the advertisement pillars on which the newspapers of Pfalzburg display their special news. Every moment its numbers were increasing. "Read it out to us!" they cried.

A man with a loud voice began to read it to the crowd, and fragments came to Dr. Wycherley's ears: "Terrible tragedy! Death of the Crown Prince! A terrible accident has occurred to our beloved Prince Karel on his wedding-night. . . . Apparently he was leaning over the battlements to pluck a flower growing in the wall, and overbalanced himself. . . . The flower

was still in his grasp. . . . Medical help was at once sent for. . . . The doctor was of opinion that death must have been practically instantaneous. . . . "

Dr. Wycherley raised his hat reverently.

"There died a prince," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COUNTESS PLUNGES

MONTE CARLO held a persistent fascination for Dr. Wycherley. Not as a field of fortune, since the doctor never staked money on the tables, but as a laboratory of human feelings, emotions and passions. There is no crowd so cosmopolitan as a Monte Carlo crowd in high season—none so expressive of the complexities of modern civilisation. To the doctor, with his peculiar outlook, they were gathered together from all the great cities of the world for the express purpose of providing him with material for study. Monte Carlo was for him an absorbing morality play—gorgeously staged, produced with sensuous, cynical realism, played by an ever-shifting crowd of actors ranging from the greatest names of the world down to the most beast-like parasites of the underworld.

A hothouse of civilisation, holding rare exotics of delicate beauty and fragrance side by side with brilliant poison-flowers.

It was on one of the doctor's visits to Monte Carlo that he became involved in the case of the Countess Varoczy and the French Government. If one adjective had to be chosen to describe the Countess, it would be unquestionably the word "daring." Daring in dress,

in jewels, in play, in mode of life. The scandals around her name were notorious in half-a-dozen capitals of Europe. She flouted public opinion—took keen delight in flouting it. It made women hate her and men flock around her.

That evening when Dr. Wycherley was watching her, the Countess was plunging wildly at the tables. Further, quite a small crowd in the Salon Privé were watching her and her play, and that is unusual at Monte Carlo. For in the gaming-rooms a beautiful woman commands as little attention as a beautiful woman at a race-meeting while the horses are racing. In the Salles des Jeux the horses are always racing. Money reigns. Interest is focussed on money—my money primarily, yours secondarily. Men and women become mentally classified as somebodies—those who play; or nobodies—those who watch. As systematists or non-systematists; as cautious or audacious; as lucky or unlucky; as good losers or bad.

It was therefore very definite tribute to the personality, beauty and audacity of the Countess Varoczy that herself and her play were being keenly observed and commented on in the hushed whispers that respect the solemnity of the temple of Mammon. She was apparently flinging money away in limit plunges on single numbers in the midst of her series bets. And yet she was winning—heavily, magnificently. The devil's luck was with her. But whether she won or lost on a *coup* there was no loss of her control and poise. She was magnificently cool. By her side was young De Carteret, lieutenant on the flagship cruiser *La Patrie*, help-

ing her in the collection and changing of her money. Underneath his well-bred restraint one could read a distinct pride in his favoured position.

In the background of that cosmopolitan crowd Dr. Wycherley was looking on at the scene with the quiet, intent gaze of the student. He might have been watching the outcome of some laboratory experiment.

There was a touch on his arm, and he turned to find beside him the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, M. Morèze. An elderly man with a white moustache and tufted imperial; well set-up in spite of years, with sure power in his face. That he had kept his post through five successive ministries was proof of his worth.

"My dear Doctor, I did not know you were a student of roulette," he said in French as he shook hands cordially.

"Roulette has no interest for me," returned Dr. Wycherley smilingly. "I have not staked even a five-franc piece for twenty years. It is men and women that interest me, and I am never tired of watching them. There is always something fresh to discover. Monte Carlo is one of my laboratories."

"How cold-blooded!"

"All keen professional men and women are inevitably cold-blooded in the exercise of their life-study. To the surgeon, you, my dear Morèze, are possibly an interesting specimen of an enlarged supra-renal. To the diplomatist, a model in the art of saying nothing with the most perfect air of bestowing a deep confidence. To the journalist, a column or so of excellent copy.

To women, an interesting problem of voluntary celibacy."

"And to yourself?"

"I am asking myself what brings you to Monte Carlo. For your interest in gambling is almost as slight as mine."

The Minister leaned forward confidentially. "You read wonderfully well. I have escaped from Paris for a brief holiday. A few days at my villa at Beaulieu, and then back to work. Ah, work—if only one could cut oneself free!"

Dr. Wycherley smiled. "That confirms a previous remark of mine."

"Which one?"

"Your peculiar interest to the diplomatist."

The Minister lowered his eyes, and Dr. Wycherley, in understanding of his meaning, did not take the matter further.

M. Morèze started another topic. "The Countess," with a glance in her direction, "does she interest you as a laboratory specimen?"

"I am not sure. So far as I have observed her, she falls into type, and the typical is to me uninteresting."

"The immemorial type?"

"Yes, this kind of woman is of all ages. Egypt, Rome, Venice, Spain, Russia—there has always been a Countess Varoczy. The epitome of sex. She reeks of sex."

"Ah, sex! If only the world were sexless . . ."

The doctor completed the sentence for him.

" . . . how much easier would be the work of a Minister for Foreign Affairs!"

"You find her 'true to type'—to borrow an expression from the language of the Mendelian?"

"So far. One can almost tell just what she will do or say under any given set of circumstances. The same daring unconventionality on the surface, the same flouting of decent opinion, and yet the same underlying conventionality of thought beneath. Their superstitions, for instance. Would you ever see a Countess Varoczy plunge on the number 13, however sure she might be that it would turn up?"

There was a sudden stir around the table of the Varoczy, a sudden whispered buzz of comment. Both the Minister and the doctor turned to look. The Countess, disdaining all other of the thirty-seven numbers, had just placed a small pile of gold, four louis on top of a five-louis piece—the limit stake—on the square of the number 13 on the green cloth.

The roulette ball had been flicked from the hand of the croupier and was running swiftly around the wall of the roulette board like a finger-click around the whispering gallery of St. Paul's. It began to slow in its course.

"*Rien-n'va-plus*," remarked the croupier in one quick word.

The roulette ball hit against a little metal deflector, rebounded sharply, and tumbled into one of the thirty-seven compartments. Without a spoken word the croupier touched with his rake the number 13 on the green cloth, and began rapidly to pull in the stakes that had

lost. The second croupier touched the Countess's pile with his rake to indicate that he was now paying out on it, and then pushed to her notes and gold to the value of thirty-five times her bet. She had won on number 13—and with a limit stake! All eyes were on her, envying, admiring. Young De Carteret glanced around with pride. Even the blasé croupiers looked appreciation of her audacity, and it is rare indeed that they are stirred out of their monotonous boredom.

But there was not the slightest trace of exultation with the Countess—still that same slightly insolent insouciance which goaded men to admiration.

The Minister turned to Dr. Wycherley with a gleam of banter in his voice. "Do you still class her in type?"

The doctor's reply held a seriousness strange in comparison to the triviality of the point: "That is the most startling happening I have seen at the tables this evening. There is always something new to learn in men and women. Yes, it is to me peculiarly interesting."

They watched her in silence for some time, still at her audacious plunging. Then M. Morèze remarked in a casual tone of voice: "You are now interested in the Countess? Good! . . . By the way, the rooms are getting uncomfortably hot, don't you think? Suppose we stroll out on the terrace. You smoke?"

"Occasionally."

"It is relieving to me to hear you have *some* vice. Shall we stroll out?"

The doctor looked keenly at the Minister for For-

eign Affairs. "It would be a great pleasure . . . to do you any service."

It was very quiet out on the terraces—few people could spare time from the gaming-tables to bathe in that wonderful scene. Tall palms, grave in their immobility like Eastern sentinels. . . . The milk-white terraces chalked against the night, velvety-black, and the motionless sea, velvety-black. . . . The tiny port of Monaco below them splashed with the reflection of the lights from the cliff-town. . . . The solitary red light that marks the harbour-mouth. . . . A yacht at anchor with lighted saloon throwing a golden comb of light into the black water. . . . Faint perfumes of exotic flowers floating lazily across the still air. . . . From a distant café the soft, caressing melody of a Viennese waltz touched by maestro artists. . . . Behind them, the milk-white Casino outlined with golden lights. . . . And behind again, the steep, scarped ramparts of mountain that take the Principality under their protection and hold it nestling in their arms against the winds and snows of the North. A picture of fairyland —a wonder of the world.

The Minister had thrown aside his air of casual, dilettante idling. He was now talking very slowly and seriously: " . . . You can indeed do me a service—a great service. And, much more, a service to France and to the Entente which binds your country and mine together. The matter is delicate in the extreme." He paused.

"You have my entire discretion."

"That goes without saying, my dear Doctor."

Again he paused in deliberation, and then plunged suddenly into the heart of his subject: "France is being betrayed. For some time past we have been preparing a secret re-organisation of the Navy in preparation for certain eventualities which I need not detail. Our plans must of course be known to the world later on, but at the moment it is vital that they should be kept secret. Yet we have information that they are being sold to a foreign power. And we want to know by whom, to whom, and how. We *must* know."

Dr. Wycherley drew back a little. "Before you proceed further, my dear Morèze, how is such a matter in my province? I am not a detective, but a psychologist."

"That is the very reason why I come to you. The detective work is done, and in any case I should not dream of asking a distinguished scientist to undertake work of that kind. We know this: that the information is being sold from Toulon, by someone in the personnel of the Navy. That has been deduced by a process of elimination. We suspect this: that it is being sold to the Countess Varoczy. We are entirely ignorant of this: how she communicates it to the foreign power in question."

Dr. Wycherley was rolling a second cigarette for himself, left-handedly and with wonderful deftness, for he never even glanced at the operation of his hands. He had trained himself to an unusual independent executive power of the rarely-used half of the cerebral hemisphere. He replied:

"But there are dozens of possible ways—code letters, telegrams, messengers."

"The Monaco police have worked in conjunction with ours. They have not been hampered by scruples. They have opened her letters, altered the wording of her telegrams, spied on almost her every movement, bribed her chauffeur, even burgled her villa in the olive-groves above the town." He pointed to the lights dotting the dark mountainside.

"Wireless telegraphy?"

"She has no apparatus. In any case our own installations have been ordered to watch for and pick up any messages."

"By water?"

"We have a spy on her yacht."

"By private interviews?"

The Minister drew out a paper from an inner pocket and unfolded it. "Here is a list of the people who have visited her during the last three weeks. There may be amongst them one who *gives* . . ." There was a note of steel in his voice. ". . . but so far as our suspicions go, not one who *takes*."

He handed the list to Dr. Wycherley, who ran his eye over it non-committally. The Minister continued: "You will see there, repeated frequently, the names of De Carteret, lieutenant; Falempin, captain of marines; Goncourt, also captain of marines; even Rocanier, rear-admiral commanding the cruiser squadron. In England, my dear Doctor, your people would doubtless hold up their hands in horror at the idea of their naval officers buzzing around a very notorious and very fas-

cinating lady, but that is a matter in which we are happily more tolerant. The moral aspect does not concern us. You will find also the names of many people well-known in what you would call our 'smart set.' . . . But the list does not help us until we know this for certain: does the Countess receive the information, and if so, how does she pass it on? Possibly, I am almost inclined to doubt if she is the intermediary, and so, I have come to Monte Carlo to observe her for myself. Our police suspicions may be entirely wrong; if so, we are wasting time and effort which is vital for the welfare of France. . . . Now, my dear Doctor, for the sake of my country and the sake of the Entente, will you give me your help?"

"How—in what way?"

"You are a psychologist—a mind-reader. I know of your wonderful gift. . . ."

Dr. Wycherley interrupted him with a gesture. "Do not exaggerate my powers. I am no worker of miracles. The psychic sense is with me only developed to a limited degree. As a Welsh lad, a patient of mine who also possessed the gift, once said: 'The minds of men to-day are like clouded glass.' That expresses it exactly. Sometimes a mind lights up with ardent thought, and one can then read clearly the shadows on the glass; sometimes one can only deduce from a vague shifting blur. There you have the reason why I am still studying the ways in which men's minds work—so that the vague blurs may tell me so much of a man's inner life as a few lines and bands in a spectrum will tell an astronomer of the life of a distant star. My psychic

gift, to accept the analogy, is a very rough and imperfect human spectroscope, and I am still at work on the meanings of the lines and bands."

"Perhaps in this case . . . ?"

"It is just possible. I cannot guarantee success, but I will make the attempt."

"A thousand thanks, my dear Doctor!"

The doctor took out his smoking materials and proceeded to roll himself a third cigarette. But this time he placed two cigarette papers end to end, so that the resulting product was nearly double the ordinary length. Then he lighted it and held it at arm's length, about knee-high, and proceeded to fix his gaze on it.

M. Morèze had been watching this strange proceeding with a very lively interest. "May I ask what you are about to do?"

"I am going to hypnotise myself. . . . The point is here: for some considerable time this evening I have been observing the Countess. That was fortunate for the purpose of this experiment, because I was then entirely neutral and unbiassed. If I went to observe her again, I should inevitably be biassed by what you have told me. . . . You know, of course, that what one consciously observes is perhaps only a twentieth part of what one sees and hears subconsciously. I am now going to try to recover the other nineteen-twentieths of my sensory impressions."

"Am I to wake you later on?"

"No, when the cigarette burns down to my fingers it will wake me automatically."

He fixed his gaze intently on the glowing end of

the cigarette, and presently his eyes closed in a light hypnoidal sleep.

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The ash dropped off at intervals as the fire burnt slowly through the tobacco, and when at length the cigarette was down to a stump the heat burnt the doctor's fingers and he awoke with a start.

"What results?" asked the Minister.

The doctor did not reply for nearly a quarter of an hour. He was obviously concentrating intently on what had passed through his mind during sleep. At length he answered: "I see possibilities. Let us go back to the tables. By the way, who was that young fellow by her side?"

"De Carteret, lieutenant on *La Patrie*. The cruiser squadron is now lying at Villefranche, within half-an-hour by train from here. De Carteret is from Normandy, and I will tell you frankly that I do not trust him far. We Frenchmen have an expression, '*fin normand*.'"

"Rear-Admiral Rocanier I have seen in the Casino. He is an oldish man, rather bent and worn, with a scraggy grey beard, is it not so?"

"Precisely."

"Falempin and Goncourt?"

"Just now I believe they are at Toulon. I could have you meet them if you wished."

"Good! Now to the tables."

When they entered the Salon Privé they found that the crowd had melted away from around the table

of the Countess. She was now playing rather soberly, staking on black and red and on four or six or eight numbers at a time—*carré* and *transversale* play.

They watched her in silence from a distance, and then Dr. Wycherley remarked suddenly: "I think I should like to try my luck at the tables."

The Minister looked at him in unconcealed surprise. "But I understood you made it a rule not to gamble?"

"I never make rigid rules for myself—life is too complex. Come and help me to collect my winnings, or finance me if I lose too much. I have an idea that my lucky numbers will turn up."

"*Your* lucky numbers!"

"Yes, 13 is one of them. I think I shall stake on 13."

There was a vacant seat at the Countess's table, and Dr. Wycherley took possession of it. As he had indicated, he laid his first stake, a five-franc piece, on the number 13 *en plein.*

By an extraordinary coincidence it won at the first attempt.

"Beginner's luck!" commented the Minister, standing at Dr. Wycherley's side. Young De Carteret, looking up, recognised and bowed to him with empressement. He gave a curious glance, too, at the doctor, a strange figure for a gambler with his silvery hair and the fine face of a man who had given his life to science and humanity. The Countess Varoczy, who had lost on the *coup,* also looked at him with curiosity as the croupier counted out thirty-five times his stake in gold

and silver and passed it over to him. But the doctor asked for all in silver—five-franc pieces.

Then, very deliberately, he laid a silver piece on 23, on 4, on 8, and two pieces on 19.

The roulette ball tumbled into compartment 11, and his stakes were swept away.

For the next coup he selected 0 for a five-franc piece, 11 for two five-franc pieces, and again 4 and 19.

"You think 11 will come up twice running?" whispered the Minister. "It seems improbable."

"I have a strong feeling it will come up again," answered Dr. Wycherley, and, strangely enough, he proved to be right.

"What extraordinary luck! You almost tempt me to follow your lead!"

"Now to concentrate on the lucky numbers."

"Which are they?"

"13, 23 and 0, 23 being the day of the month."

For a dozen *coups* or more he kept staking on those three numbers, together with sundry bets on black and red and on *transversales*. His curious deliberateness, coupled with his personality of the scientist, made the onlookers think that he was perhaps a mathematician with a new and infallible system, and some of them, including the Countess, began to follow his lead.

But capricious Fortune seemed to have tired of her protégé, and after various ups and downs of luck he finally found himself with but a single five-franc piece remaining out of all his winnings.

"I think I shall stop now," he remarked.

"You ought to have stopped after your second win *en plein*," answered M. Morèze as they made their way out. "Such luck was far too good to continue."

"I am quite satisfied. I have had my little gamble without expense. Now I am beginning to think that roulette is a much more interesting game than I had imagined."

"You have tasted blood!" laughed the Minister. Then he added very seriously, when they were out of earshot of the loungers in the Casino atrium: "What deductions have you made?"

"I would prefer not to speak until I am sure. Please do me this favour: invite the Countess to dine with you to-morrow evening at your villa, and myself also."

"My dear Doctor! Invite a lady I have never met to dine with me, a bachelor and a Minister, at my villa!"

Dr. Wycherley smiled. "With your diplomatic gifts, you will be able to find an excuse for the invitation that will make it appear the most natural thing in the world."

"You set me a problem indeed!"

"And so I enlist your professional interest. Come, you are not to be beaten by a problem in diplomacy!"

The Minister stopped in thought. "I will go back and get an introduction through De Carteret, if you will excuse me."

"Certainly. And please extend a pressing invitation also to De Carteret, Rocanier, Falempin and Goncourt. This is vital."

"Your methods are beyond me, but I will do as you say."

"My methods are open for all the world to read," answered the doctor with his gentle cynicism. "That is why they are so obscure."

CHAPTER IX

THE NUMBER 13

DR. WYCHERLEY arrived early at the Villa Felicité at Beaulieu.

The Minister met him with an open telegram in his hand. "The Countess accepted my invitation last night," he said, "but just an hour ago I received this wire to say that she is suddenly indisposed and begs to be excused."

"Capital!" answered Dr. Wycherley.

"I don't follow you!"

"Beaulieu is well beyond the frontier of the Principality of Monaco, you will note."

M. Morèze looked at him searchingly, perplexity in his eyes. "Have you seen her or met her since last night, or written to her?"

"No, to all those questions. I had an entirely different piece of work on hand—a Monaco doctor I know called me in to help him with a case of his, a Monégasque tradesman with a most extraordinary hallucination of touch. An extremely interesting case. The real cause of the trouble was far removed from the sensory hallucination. We employed the technique of psycho-analysis, and . . . but this would scarcely interest you."

The Minister regarded the doctor somewhat coldly. "Where the safety of France is concerned . . ." he began.

"Please do not imagine I am neglecting the work I had promised to help you with. I had set matters in train, and there was nothing further for me to do until this morning. I hope all four of the naval men will be here to-night."

"All four have accepted. I made the invitation seem as if it had an importance beyond mere sociability."

"Capital! Now, my dear Morèze, if you will allow me, I will go round your garden. Trees are one of my hobbies, and I think I see some fine specimens. What is that strange dwarf tree over there—the leaves are just peeping over the camellia bushes? The scent from it is to me peculiarly attractive."

"It is from Indo-China. I shall have to ask my gardener to tell you the name of it."

"By the way, have you an atlas in your smoking-lounge?"

"In my study I have one."

"Please do me the favour of having it moved to the smoking-lounge. And, for another point, after I have brought the conversation round to the atlas and have threshed out my point in connection with it, will you be good enough to refer to my gift of mind-reading? In the ordinary way I greatly dislike having this exaggerated, but for to-night there are special reasons. And as you know, I do not allow myself to be tied by rigid rules."

"You certainly had beginner's luck at the tables!" answered the Minister, taking the allusion. "But you ought to have stopped at your second win *en plein*. Ah, if we only knew the moment when to stop!"

Dr. Wycherley turned away to examine the dwarf tree with the strange new scent.

Goncourt and Falempin arrived together, having come by the same train. During dinner the doctor carefully observed them as well as the other two, Rocanier and De Carteret, making his quiet deductions and conclusions.

Captain Falempin was a man who spoke little and drank little—an elderly young man who had mastered the art of taking more than he gave. Goncourt, on the other hand, was somewhat flamboyant and Southern in his exuberance, and as the wine passed round he opened his mind freely on any subject that cropped up.

Not until they were all settled in the smoking-lounge over cigars and liqueurs did Dr. Wycherley begin to take command of the conversation, and then it was by a most unexpected turn. He was standing in the open doorway, profile to the rest, a clean-cut silhouette against the lighted veranda. He said very deliberately:

"You Frenchmen are the most inhumane of the civilised nations."

There was an instant chorus of surprise, of dissent, of challenge.

"To prove my point, I need only refer to your penal system. You have abolished the guillotine, and what have you substituted? Penal servitude in the

most deadly climates in the world, under conditions of living that are practically inhuman tortures."

"But they have their chance!" protested Goncourt. "In about fifteen years they are released, if their conduct has been good."

"Do any of you know that the death-rate in Guiana amongst the hard labour prisoners is over 10 per cent per annum?" pursued the doctor remorselessly. He picked up an atlas and rapidly turned over the leaves until he had come to a map of the Carribean Sea, which he laid open on a table before them.

"Here is your French Guiana—one of the most pestilential swamps in the world. Mosquitoes by the myriad; *manioc* ants avid for human flesh; the *chiques* that burrow under the skin and cause tortures of itching; a score of other insect plagues; and then malaria, dysentery, and yellow fever. Fifteen years! Why, less than ten years is a man's life in penal servitude in Guiana. Ten years of daily, hourly torture!"

His voice had risen in hot indignation. "And then, worse, your Devil's Isle for a traitor—imprisonment for the term of his natural life. Not even the poor ghost of illusory hope that some day release might come! Dreyfus once talked to me of his five years on the Devil's Isle—it made me shudder as no hospital or prison sight has ever done. It was an absolute miracle of will-power that he managed to keep his reason."

"There is no one there now," put in Falempin. (This was some years before Ulmo was sent to life imprisonment on the Isle for selling State secrets.)

"No . . . but it is waiting. And if it were in my

power to hand the vilest wretch in the world over to the mercies of your French law, I doubt if I could bring myself to do so!"

There was silence in the room. The Minister struck a match to light a fresh cigar, and the splutter of it cut fiercely into the silence.

Then Dr. Wycherley closed the atlas and returned to his place by the doorway, profile in silhouette—the splendid profile of a man who had given his life to science and humanity.

M. Morèze turned the subject abruptly. "I wonder if you know of the doctor's extraordinary power of mind-reading," he said. "He dislikes to mention it himself, but I have seen him do marvellous things in that direction."

"Do you mean under hypnotism?" asked the Admiral. "That is believable."

"No, just in ordinary life. While we have been sitting here, who knows but what he may have been reading all our inmost thoughts?"

"I confess myself a sceptic. One cannot believe that kind of thing without first-hand evidence."

"Doctor, will you give us a demonstration?" pursued the Minister. "And who will volunteer for the experiment?"

"Thanks!" answered Goncourt with emphatic meaning. "Drag out our little love affairs into the indecent light of day—thanks!" There was a general laugh at this, and the tension was broken.

From the doorway Dr. Wycherley said dreamily:

"As a scientist I read the thoughts of others, and as a humanitarian I keep my knowledge to myself."

Later in the evening, as the party broke up, Rear-Admiral Rocanier offered Dr. Wycherley a lift in his motor-car back to Monte Carlo.

"Many thanks," answered the doctor. And presently: "Shall we take the upper Corniche? There is a glorious view from the hills on such a night as this." And presently again: "I should like to take a rough sketch of this view. Shall we stop for a few moments?"

The Admiral's hand trembled as he grasped his cane, and he drew his cloak around him as though the warm night-air were chilly.

"You are cold," said Dr. Wycherley after a little while. "As a doctor I suggest to you a short, brisk walk. If the car were sent on, we might rejoin it."

And then, walking side by side in the black, velvety night, the mental healer waited patiently for the moment when the Admiral should confess to him.

Three days later M. Morèze asked Dr. Wycherley with veiled impatience whether he had not anything to report, for in the meanwhile the doctor had given no word of his deductions or suspicions.

"It is all settled," answered the doctor, very simply.

"All settled!"

"Yes. Acting in your name, I have ventured to allow the Countess Varoczy twenty-four hours in which to leave the Principality of Monaco and get over the Italian frontier."

"And she has taken your orders?" asked the Minister in blank surprise.

"Otherwise it would have been very uncomfortable for her. Monaco has only an area of a few square miles, and any short motor-ride would have taken her into French territory, where she might have been liable to arrest. She was wise to take my warning."

"But, but—the man? *Who is the man?*"

"I have no intention of revealing his name. Believe me, my dear Morèze, when I say that France has nothing to fear from him. To that I pledge my word."

"Keep a traitor in our Navy? Unthinkable!"

"I have never said that he was of the personnel of your Navy. The list you gave me included a wide range of names."

"But I insist on knowing!"

"So that you may have him sent to the Devil's Isle? No—not through my agency. It is precisely at this point that my professional cold-bloodedness ends and your professional cold-bloodedness begins. You set me a problem in practical psychology which interested me greatly, and I have been fortunate enough to solve it. If I have done any service to France, the knowledge of having done so is sufficient reward for me."

"But your methods of solving it?"

"To tell you that now would be to incriminate the man . . . or woman. Some day, perhaps, when the matter is dead and forgotten—if you are then still interested. I admit that then you would be fully entitled to know."

* * * * * * *

The occasion came sooner than the doctor had foreseen. Rear-Admiral Rocanier had gone to his death like a brave man during the wreck of *La Patrie* on the cliffs of Majorca, in that memorable gale of November 19th, eight months later. Under seal of confidence, that his memory might not be blackened to his descendants, Dr. Wycherley revealed the full story to the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

"He was infatuated with the Countess with the blind infatuation of an old man. In a young man duty and ambition may together turn the scale against the madness of desire, but in an old man who has reached to his highest post and has no spur of ambition, duty is a poor counterweight. Naturally, with a woman such as the Countess Varoczy, there was a heavy price to pay, and his madness of desire drove him to pay it. He gave me his word, after that evening at your villa, that he would break with his passion and give ample recompense to his country, and I knew that he was speaking from his heart."

"But how did you discover all this?"

"Through the number 13."

"Please explain."

"You remember that on the terrace at Monte Carlo I hypnotised myself in order to recover my full impressions of the Countess. The dominant impression that kept forcing itself upon me was the psychological strangeness of her plunge to the limit on the number 13. In my sleep I went through every play that I had seen her make that evening, *coup* after *coup*, and never once

before or again had I seen her stake *en plein* on number 13.

"There must have been some strong reason for that unnatural bet, and I set myself to analyse all possible motives, eliminating them one after another in methodical, scientific fashion. And then suddenly I came to the obvious truth."

"That . . ."

"That roulette might be a much more interesting game than I had imagined. That it presents the most perfect opportunity for the exchange of cipher messages that one could possibly wish for. Consider. On the green cloth are marked thirty-seven numbers, from 0 to 36 inclusive. That gives you in code your twenty-six letters of the alphabet, your ten numerals, and one number in excess. The number to be eliminated from the code would evidently be the unlucky number 13, and if it were used it must have some very special significance. Now M happens to be the thirteenth letter of the alphabet, and M is the initial letter of your own name. . . ."

"You mean that she was staking out a code message about myself when she plunged to the limit on 13!" interrupted M. Morèze, startled out of himself.

"Precisely. I called back from the storehouse of my memories the other numbers on which she staked *en plein* while we were watching her together, and they pieced together into a flippantly contemptuous message in regard to yourself."

"The devil! What was the message?"

"We need not enter into that. But you can imag-

ine her malicious pleasure in piecing out the message under your very nose. Under the full glare of the lamplight, with a crowd of people watching her every movement, with you yourself keenly studying her!"

The Minister's mouth tightened with suppressed anger. Few men can rise superior to ridicule—especially the ridicule of a woman. He remarked abruptly: "It was a dangerous game to play!"

"I do not agree, my dear Morèze. While your detectives and spies were opening her letters, altering her telegrams, eavesdropping on her private conversations, and even burgling her private bureau, she was in the habit of calmly passing on her information under the full glare of the lamplight, openly for anyone to read. It is the most conventional, the most undangerous form of audacity."

"To whom did she pass it on?"

"Who can say? In that cosmopolitan crowd around the tables it might have been any man or woman. I deduced at once that the code would have to be a very simple one, easily carried in mind, because the accomplice could not dare to take written notes of a cipher message with a dozen people looking over his shoulder. Its simplicity would not endanger its security, for who would guess in the first place that her wild gambling was merely the tapping out of a code message? The alphabet ran from 0 to 26—excluding 13, your special number—and 27 to 36 stood for the ten numerals. Any by-play on *carres*, *transversales*, *colonnes* or *chances simples* would be ignored in reading the messages.

"So I returned with you to the tables to play back her code on her. I started, you may remember, with a stake on the number 13, which by pure chance happened to win; I continued, when I saw that I had her attention, with 23, 4, 8 and double 19; I followed it with 0, double 11, 4 and 19. That formed the message 'M. weiss alles,' 'Morèze knows all.'

"Now came the crucial moment: how would she take it? Without a word spoken, without a gesture exchanged, there took place a very pretty bout of thought-fencing. While her face remained a cold mask, her mind was buzzing with perplexity. In my mental spectroscope I saw, so to speak, the lines and bands that I have long since learnt to correlate with perplexity. Her thoughts probably ran in some such fashion as this: Who is that strange old man playing my code? Is he friend or enemy? Is it a bluff or a warning? He seems to be very friendly with Morèze. Or is his staking a matter of pure chance?

"She gave no answer, so I began to hammer home my message, 13, 23, 0—M, w, a . . . 13, 23, 0—M, w, a . . . 13, 23, 0—M, w, a . . . until I had it driven in right on the nerve. Still she was suspicious, and when her answer was at length wrung out of her it was non-committal—merely a repetition on her part of my M, w, a. But that was sufficient for my purpose, and I then had you invite her to dinner at your villa. That move must again have caused her acute perplexity."

"For a moment she hesitated perceptibly, but she recovered almost at once and accepted rather gushingly," answered the Minister.

"With a woman of that kind, her first thoughts would naturally be for her own safety. She suspected a trap. So she accepted, and then found a convenient indisposition the next day. That placed the matter beyond a doubt. . . . The rest was simple. Probably she had the decency to pass on a warning to the Admiral, and that, coupled with our conversation in your smoking-lounge, drove him inevitably to confession."

The Minister thought in silence for a few moments. Then he said: "I am glad, now, that you would not give up his name. As you said, a keen professional man is always cold-blooded in the exercise of his life-work. I did not appreciate your point of view at the time, but I do now. . . . By the way, your service to France has not yet been suitably rewarded. What honour can I bestow on you? I know that money is out of the question with you, but possibly there is some decoration?"

Dr. Wycherley smiled cordially. "Many thanks, my dear Morèze, but I am going to ask for something much more valuable to me."

"Anything whatever in my power to give. Gladly!"

"That rare tree of yours from Indo-China. I have been coveting it shamelessly. If you could have it transplanted to my garden on Isola Salvatore . . . ?"

CHAPTER X

"THEY SAY SHE IS BEWITCHED"

SHE was climbing painfully on her knees the long flight of stone steps that leads from the Grotto of the Vision of Bernadette up to the great double Basilique of Lourdes. With her, helping and encouraging, was her parish priest, Père Bonivet.

"Courage, my child, and faith!" he was whispering. "Have faith, and all will be well. Only faith in Our Lady can cure you."

Out of the crowd of the sick and the dying that had come to Lourdes—the lame, the blind, the palsied, the epileptic, the tuberculous, the cancerous—this peasant girl had above all attracted the attention of Dr. Wycherley. He was there in pursuit of his life-study, psychological research, for at Lourdes there gather a great multitude of those who are sick in mind. Apart from his study of the cures that earnest faith brings to pass at the Shrine of Notre Dame de Lourdes, many of his previous cases had been garnered there—cases where faith had been powerless to heal the injured mind.

This young peasant girl, scarcely more than a child, now on her knees on the long flight of stone steps, had attracted Dr. Wycherley's attention above all the rest. There was that in her face that lifted her out of the

ruck of peasants. Not the beauty of her features, nor her soft, liquid eyes, nor her raven-black hair was it that first caught the attention of the observer, but the spiritual light in her soul that shone through her face as a light shines through wax.

She might have posed as a model for a Joan of Arc when the call first came to her at Domrémy.

Dr. Wycherley watched the girl and the priest on their painful climb to the Basilique, as he had watched them on many days previously; he waited outside the church until they came from their long devotions. In Père Bonivet's face was a look of deep disappointment; in the eyes of the girl was a hardened look, a glitter that had not been there before. The light on her soul no longer shone clear—it was as though a marsh mist had dimmed it with a clammy film.

As the priest was hurrying her to their temporary home in the town, Dr. Wycherley raised his hat and addressed him.

"*Mon père,*" he said, "I ask your pardon for this intrusion if it is unwelcome. But I, like yourself, do my humble best to help the weak and the suffering, and I see clearly that your pilgrimage to Lourdes has not brought the benefit you hoped for mademoiselle."

"We must be patient. In God's good time He will vouchsafe His mercies," returned the priest. "But I thank you. I see that you have the good heart."

"If you should need me . . . " said Dr. Wycherley, and wrote the name of his hotel on his card. Père Bonivet took the card and thanked him courteously.

On the evening of the next day the priest called on Dr. Wycherley in anxious distress of mind.

"I have come," he said, "because I fear that this case is beyond my powers. It may be that I am unworthy—that my soul is too stained with the cares and pettinesses of this world to take my prayers before the Most High. To-night I can do nothing with Jeanne. She has blasphemed against the Holy Name. She will not listen to me! It is terrible, pitiable! And," he lowered his voice to an impressive whisper, "the mark of the beast is coming upon her!" He shuddered at his own words.

Dr. Wycherley drew a chair forward for Père Bonivet. "Will you not sit down and tell me the trouble of mademoiselle? I have studied many cases of diseased mind, and it may be my knowledge can help. She is *hystérique*, is it not so?"

"So the doctor has told us, but in the Landes, where Jeanne Dorthez lives and where I go about the work of my Master, the peasants give it another name—a very terrible name. They say she is possessed—bewitched!

"Myself I believe nothing of that," added the priest hastily. "I am of the modern school, and such things belong to the superstitions of the Middle Ages. So I laid the case of Jeanne Dorthez before Monseigneur the Bishop, and he advised me to take her on a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Out of his own purse our good bishop gave the money that was necessary for us, for Jeanne is but a poor peasant girl, the daughter of a

woodcutter of the Landes, and myself I have little to spare."

"If they say she is bewitched, then they must have in mind some man or woman on whom they place suspicion of sorcery."

"You are right, monsieur. They say that Osper Camargo has bewitched her. They whisper many terrible things of Osper Camargo, that he is in league with the Evil One; but you and I, should we put belief in the superstitious chatter of peasants?"

The mental healer did not answer this. "Jeanne is a good girl," he said; "it is plain for all to read. When her attacks come upon her, she changes in mind, is it not so?"

"She changes terribly. To-night she blasphemed against the Holy Name. I greatly fear that she may lose her reason."

"What other signs?"

"Of course, monsieur, it is nonsense what I have now to tell you. But one day the women of the village forced her to be examined, and they whisper that upon her they found places where the prick of a pin was not felt!"

"Those places were of a definite and regular shape?"

"How did monsieur guess? Yes. The shape of the pentacle—that is what they whisper. The doctor at Mont de Marsan could find nothing, and myself I did not believe it. But to-night I have seen the mark of the beast upon her! Red upon her breast!" Again he shuddered, and crossed himself hastily.

Dr. Wycherley looked very thoughtful. "Let us go to see Jeanne," he suggested, and from a travelling medicine-chest slipped a few phials into his pocket.

The girl was lodging near at hand, and in a few minutes they had arrived at the house, a humble dwelling in a little back street of the town. When they were a few yards from the door the figure of a man slipped out quickly from the threshold and into the darkness of an alleyway.

The priest started back. "For a moment I thought that was Osper Camargo! But the light is tricky in this narrow ruelle."

"He has a scrawny beard and a pair of evil-looking eyes?" asked Dr. Wycherley.

"Camargo has that and a nose crushed by the fall of a pine-tree upon his face. It was at the time of the accident—many years ago now—that he ceased to attend Mass, and after that he gradually became feared by the villagers. But of course it could not be Camargo, for he is far from here in the salt-marshes of the Landes. There would be no reason why he should come to Lourdes."

The woman who opened the door to them put her finger to her lips. "S'sh, *mon père*, she is at last asleep! It was with difficulty that we could quiet her."

They moved softly upstairs to the room, and at Dr. Wycherley's request the woman turned back the bedclothes and opened the girl's nightgown.

Above and between her breasts, distinct and unmistakable, was an angry reddish patch of the shape of a pentacle.

"Last night I saw it for the first time!" whispered the woman, with horror in her voice. "To-night it is much redder! Monsieur le Curé, Monsieur le Docteur, what can it mean?"

Jeanne stirred in her sleep, and in her sleep murmured: "I will come. Oh, cease to torment me, for I will come!"

Dr. Wycherley stayed the night through in the girl's room, watching and studying her. Outside the window the Gave de Pau roared unceasingly down its torrential bed. There was menace in its voice.

* * * * * * *

Jeanne awoke in the morning with a curious dull glaze in her eyes. She expressed a strong desire to return home to her hamlet of Aureilhac, in spite of the counsels of Père Bonivet still to have patience and faith.

He appealed to Dr. Wycherley, but the latter drew him aside and suggested earnestly: "Let Jeanne have her way, *mon père.* I think it will be for the best. . . . It is upon your lips to tell me that if she will only have faith enough, she will be cured. Yes, but she has not the faith; she has lost heart. . . . Now you are about to ask me what can be hoped for if the pilgrimage to Lourdes has failed."

"You read my thoughts, monsieur!" said the priest in surprise.

"And you, *mon père,* read mine, for you see that I wish for Jeanne only what will be for her good."

"Yes, yes. But if she goes back to the Landes with her faith broken, who can save her from madness?

I, alas, am not worthy to do this work for my Master—that I bow my head in sorrow to acknowledge."

"We must work together; I will return with you."

"But her father, Pierre Dorthez, is only a poor woodcutter. In the Landes we are all poor. How could we pay you, monsieur? No doubt you would need many francs—perhaps many hundred francs." To his simple mind the sum loomed vast.

"*Mon père*, you and I have both learnt that the true money lies in the grateful hearts of men and women."

The priest raised his hand in benediction. "I know not if you are of our faith, monsieur, but may the blessing of God be upon you!"

They travelled by slow, cross-country trains to the village of Labouheyre in the middle of the Landes district. It was a hot and sultry day, and the hundred-mile train journey seemed interminable.

Beyond Dax they had come into the true Landes country—great silent pine-forests alternating with wide stretches of sedgy marshland. At Labouheyre their arrival was unexpected, but one of the villagers at once offered to drive them in his ox-cart to Aureilhac. It was an honour to do a service for Père Bonivet.

But Dr. Wycherley noted that the villager took care that Jeanne should not touch him even with her garment.

The two oxen drew them along the great silent highway that runs, level and straight, northwards to Bordeaux, stone-paved like the streets of a town to bear

the weight of the lumbering timber-waggons. The oxen plodded along with the slow patience which is theirs.

The silence of the great forest fell upon them. Even in the full light of the afternoon the sombre forest carried something of the grim and awesome. No wonder that for the simple peasants there were still spirits of evil that lurked in its shadows and on Midsummer Eve gathered together for unholy revels out in the marsh of Arjuzanx.

From time to time they would pass a solitary goat-herd lying down on his rough skin coat and dully guarding his little flock of long-haired goats. Once they caught sight of the local postman making his round on the stilts of the Landes to the outlying huts and farms, separated by stretches of marshland impassable on foot.

The ox-cart turned off the highway into a forest track deep-rutted from its winter traffic of heavy timber-waggons. The forest took them to its sombre heart. A grey film began to spread across the sky, shutting out the sunlight. But still it was hot and oppressive.

Late in the afternoon they reached the hamlet of Aureilhac—a few low-roofed wooden houses in a clearing where lean hens scratched for food. Pierre Dorthez, returning from his day's work in the forest, raised his hat to Père Bonivet and greeted them dully. He said little, either of comment or question, but ordered Jeanne to make ready a dinner for the visitors. Himself he would kill a fowl and gather vegetables for the soup.

As the girl set about her work, Dr. Wycherley

watched her keenly from his seat in the kitchen that served also as living-room. She was intent on her duties by the *pot-au-feu*, but there was a suppressed excitement underlying her that showed in the twitchings of her hands and the pallor of her face. It was no longer translucent in its whiteness, but of a dull and clammy pallor like the colour of a marsh mist. And in her eyes there was once more the hard glitter. Now and again she would secretly put her hand to her bosom as though to satisfy herself that something of value hidden beneath her dress was still there.

When the simple dinner was over, Dr. Wycherley drew Père Bonivet aside.

"Where does this Osper Camargo live?" he asked. "I wish to see him."

"But surely you do not believe in these superstitions of the ignorant peasants, monsieur?"

"In my studies I have met many strange things, and I try to keep the open mind. I would see this man for myself."

"He lives in a solitary hut out on the marshes—on the marsh of Arjuzanx. But do not go to-night, for the way is treacherous!"

"I must go to-night, *mon père*—or it may be too late. Can one of the villagers show me the path?"

"At night-time they would not dare to."

"Can I find it for myself?"

"On the stilts there are many paths, but on foot only one that is safe. If you are determined to go, I must lead you there myself."

"Thank you—I accept your help willingly. But

I shall ask you to return without me and keep guard over Jeanne while I am away."

The last gleams of the setting sun shone from between an angry bank of clouds as they came out of the forest on to the marsh-land. The pools, stagnant with slime, turned to blood, then grew dark and chill.

"It may be a bad night, monsieur," said the priest warningly. "See how the clouds have massed in the west, over the Bay of Biscay!"

"If necessary, I will spend the night with Osper Camargo," answered Dr. Wycherley quietly.

A tortuous path amongst the firmer parts of the marshland brought them within sight of a low hut. It was surrounded by a few stunted trees on ground a little above the general level. Around them again were the dark sedges, whispering amongst themselves, and the chill, dank pools of slime. A marsh bird called to its mate with a strange, eerie cry.

"Is the way straight from here onwards?" asked Dr. Wycherley at length.

"Yes, you have but to follow the path. Only be careful that you sound around you with your stick should the foot tread on ground that gives."

"Then I would ask you to return at once to guard Jeanne. If necessary, give her bromide from the tablets in this phial. See to it that she does not leave the house to-night. *Au revoir, mon père.*"

CHAPTER XI

THE HUT ON THE MARSH

THE hut was silent and lightless. After knocking at the door fruitlessly, Dr. Wycherley lifted the latch and entered.

It was empty save for a lean grey cat that arched her back and spat at him. The bigger of the two rooms, serving as kitchen and bedroom, showed by small signs that it had been unoccupied for days. There was nothing to be done but to wait for the return of the owner, for no one at Aureilhac had been able to tell of his movements.

It was a lonesome, weary vigil. The cat, refusing overtures of friendship, had stalked out into the night. The clock over the fireplace was silent, for it had run down during the owner's absence. Around the room were tokens that this Osper Camargo worked on the superstitions of his neighbours, for conspicuous on the walls were a human skull, dead bats nailed up with outspread wings, snakes and blind-worms preserved in spirit, and other devices common to sorcerers of all ages. A heavy locked chest doubtless contained more of his paraphernalia.

But to Dr. Wycherley the most significant object

in the room was hung above the bed where the peasant of the Landes would place his crucifix.

It was a small pentacle in hammered iron.

For many hours the doctor waited patiently in the lightless hut. For times such as this he had trained himself to a habit of deep thought that lost count of place and time, but yet was alert to the least unusual sign. He had made his brain his servant to an extent far beyond the usual with men.

His thoughts ran on the records in hieroglyphic that have come down to us of the sorcerers of ancient Egypt, the men who claimed that they could use the gods to work their will. He had spent many interesting hours with Professor Clovis Marnier, the great Egyptologist, listening to his demonstration of the meaning of the hieroglyphs.

There was a sound out of the darkness—a plash in a distant pool. At the instant his watchful senses had flashed the message to his brain, and he was awake and alert. But he kept still in his chair.

The sounds came nearer. The door opened, and a man entered with a lantern, under his arm a pair of stilts slimy from the marsh pools. Placing the lantern on a table, he began to lay sticks on the dead ashes of the hearth, the grey cat rubbing affectionately round his legs. He had a ragged, scrawny beard and moustache, and his nose was crushed in the way Père Bonivet had described. A face with evil lines—an evil mind behind it.

He had not seen Dr. Wycherley. When at length he caught sight of him, sitting quietly in the chair in

a corner of the room, he started violently and called out in the harsh, twanging dialect of the Landes: "*Sangrediable*, get on your knees!"

The doctor made no reply, but sat still.

"Who are you?" cried Camargo, flashing the lantern upon him.

"Peace, brother!" answered Dr. Wycherley. "Peace to you in the names of Khabbakhel and Knouripharіza, our masters."

"But I don't know you! What are you doing here?"

"We have met in the plane of the spirit," answered Dr. Wycherley courteously. "Though I live afar off, I have long wished to visit you and learn of your wisdom."

The man was clearly puzzled. Suspicion lay behind his narrow eyes. And yet his vanity was touched. Dr. Wycherley had allowed no trace of irony or ridicule to appear in his words. They had a tone of grave deference in them.

Osper Camargo twisted his hands uneasily. Finally he hit on a satisfactory answer: "You want to buy wisdom from me—*hein?*"

"Come!" remonstrated the doctor. "Payment between brothers of the craft?"

"If you want to learn, you pay!"

"Very well," answered the doctor, with assumed reluctance, and drew out a gold piece from his pocket.

The man's eyes glittered cunningly.

"Not enough!"

"This I will give you beforehand, and again a louis when you have shown me what I do not know already."

He showed a second gold piece.

"Do you know the incantation that brings the sickness upon the oxen? Or the incantation that drives the goats to madness? With them one can make money."

"Those," answered Dr. Wycherley, "are elementary. I had hoped to see bigger proof of your powers. Even in my land they speak of the spells you can lay on man or woman."

Osper Camargo's pride was awakened.

"They speak well, for I have those powers, and I use them. But," a cunning glitter came again into his eyes, "I work within the law. Whatever I do, it is such that the law cannot touch me. Oh, I am careful!"

"We have all to be prudent. A friend of mine, the great sorcerer Smith, doubtless you have heard of him, desired greatly a young girl of his neighbourhood, but she was of tender years, and the law of his country would not permit that he cast spells to bring her to his side. So he waited."

"As I have waited!" cried Camargo fiercely. "As I have waited these long years! If the mother would have none of me, the child shall—and willingly! It is my right! Everything is prepared!"

With a dramatic gesture he drew out a key from his pocket and opened the heavy oaken chest. The upper part of it was filled with dresses and dress material. There was silk and good cambric in the heap. He

plunged his hands into it, fondling the garments, letting them rustle through his fingers.

"A fine trousseau for the bride," commented Dr. Wycherley. "She should be well pleased."

"A bride? Maybe yes or maybe no. Of one girl one may get tired. Why tie oneself up with the law?" He shut the lid of the chest and turned the key. "But that is not the only reason why I desire her. No, no. There is another reason, a stronger reason—a reason that you of the craft should well know!"

Now it was Dr. Wycherley's turn to be puzzled. He thought he had gauged the man's mainspring of action. His motive was surely horrible enough—what worse could lie behind? And yet it must be something within the law, for the man was plainly stating truth as to his devilish prudence.

To gain time, Dr. Wycherley asked: "What is her name?"

"Ask at Aureilhac," answered Camargo. "They will tell you quickly enough!"

There was a note of triumph in his tone that expressed the near fulfilment of his desire. From the law he had nothing to fear, for the law takes no cognisance of wizardry as such, and it was plain that he had no fear of man's intervention. Perhaps they could keep the girl away from his hut for a week, two weeks, a month even—but what of that? He had waited many long years. He could wait a little longer if necessary. Small wonder that Osper Camargo boasted openly of his desires.

"You do not know my second motive!" mocked the sorcerer.

Dr. Wycherley replied deferentially:

"No, I am but a learner at the craft, and you are a master. I have come from afar to drink of your wisdom."

"This much will I show you. To-day I procured it, and it completes the preparations that are necessary."

He flashed a small corked glass tube from his pocket, and quickly returned it to its shelter. In the fitful light from the lantern Dr. Wycherley could only gather the impression that it contained the dried ear of some cereal—barley or perhaps rye. It puzzled him still further. The thought of poison passed across his mind, but this he at once put aside. Osper Camargo was a coward at heart and would never risk the vengeance of the law in that way. But if not poison, what could it mean? A dried ear of barley—or perhaps rye.

"You speak of your powers," said Dr. Wycherley, "but you give me no proof. It may be that this girl is in love with you and will come willingly at your call."

"Ask at Aureilhac!" returned the sorcerer again, licking his lips. "Ask if she has been willing to come. But now I have her in my hands. When I crook my little finger, she will come."

From the west a flash of lightning filled the hut with light, showing with startling distinctness the fire of evil passion in the face of Osper Camargo.

"Shall I give you proof of my power?" he asked fiercely.

"For that I have journeyed from afar, and for that I will pay the further louis," returned the doctor.

The sorcerer set about his preparations quickly, while outside the storm gathered and the distant lightning flashed. First he lit a fire on the hearth and into it threw some powder that gave out a strong odour of balsam. Next he took down the small iron pentacle from its nail over the bed, and hung it by a string round the neck of the grey cat. Then he scattered sand on the floor, and on the sand traced a magical enclosure fringed with mystic signs. In the enclosure he placed a small iron vessel containing a slow-burning pastille with a pungent odour, and next to it a rough wax doll, which bore a certain resemblance to Jeanne Dorthez.

His preparations completed, the sorcerer began to recite strange incantations, swaying himself backwards and forwards in time to the words, beginning low and quietly and gradually working himself up to a pitch of hysterical frenzy. Finally he reached the stage where automatism of the lower centres holds sway in the brain. Writhing and foaming at the mouth, he fell in a fit upon the bed. After a little the jerking muscles quieted down; the sorcerer was in a trance.

Dr. Wycherley had watched with intense interest every detail of the fantastic operation, endeavouring to disentangle the essential and the significant from the gibberish of abracadabra and the puerilities of the wax doll. From the first there had been no doubt in his

mind that this Osper Camargo was a dangerous man. The problem in hand was: how far did his powers in the realm of the supernormal extend?

The anæsthetic patches on the body of Jeanne Dorthez which had seemed of such horrible significance to the goodwives of the neighbourhood—these were a not unusual symptoms of a patient suffering from hysteria. The shape of the patches was probably the result of a post-hypnotic suggestion; the red mark on the breast of the girl could be produced by the same means. At the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris many such experiments have been carried out. Dr. Wycherley had no doubt whatever that this Osper Camargo had gained influence over her mind and had been working to bend it to his own will—the appearance on her body of the symbolic pentacle would react on her mind and convince her that she belonged to him, body and soul.

But how would Camargo bring her over the marshes that night? How far did his telepathic powers extend, if he possessed them at all?

Dr. Wycherley searched the room for some indication that might have escaped him, and suddenly he found it. It was a negative indication—during the rigamarole of the incantations and the rhythmic swayings the grey cat had slipped out of the room.

At once a vivid mental picture came before his eyes of the cat padding swiftly over the dark path through the marshes—through the forest to the hamlet of Aureilhac—reaching the low wooden house of the Dorthez—scratching at the bedroom window of the girl—Jeanne opening the window at the call and seeing the

pentacle around its neck, the sign of her master—dressing swiftly and slipping out of the window—following it back to the marsh of Arjuzanx and the hut of the sorcerer.

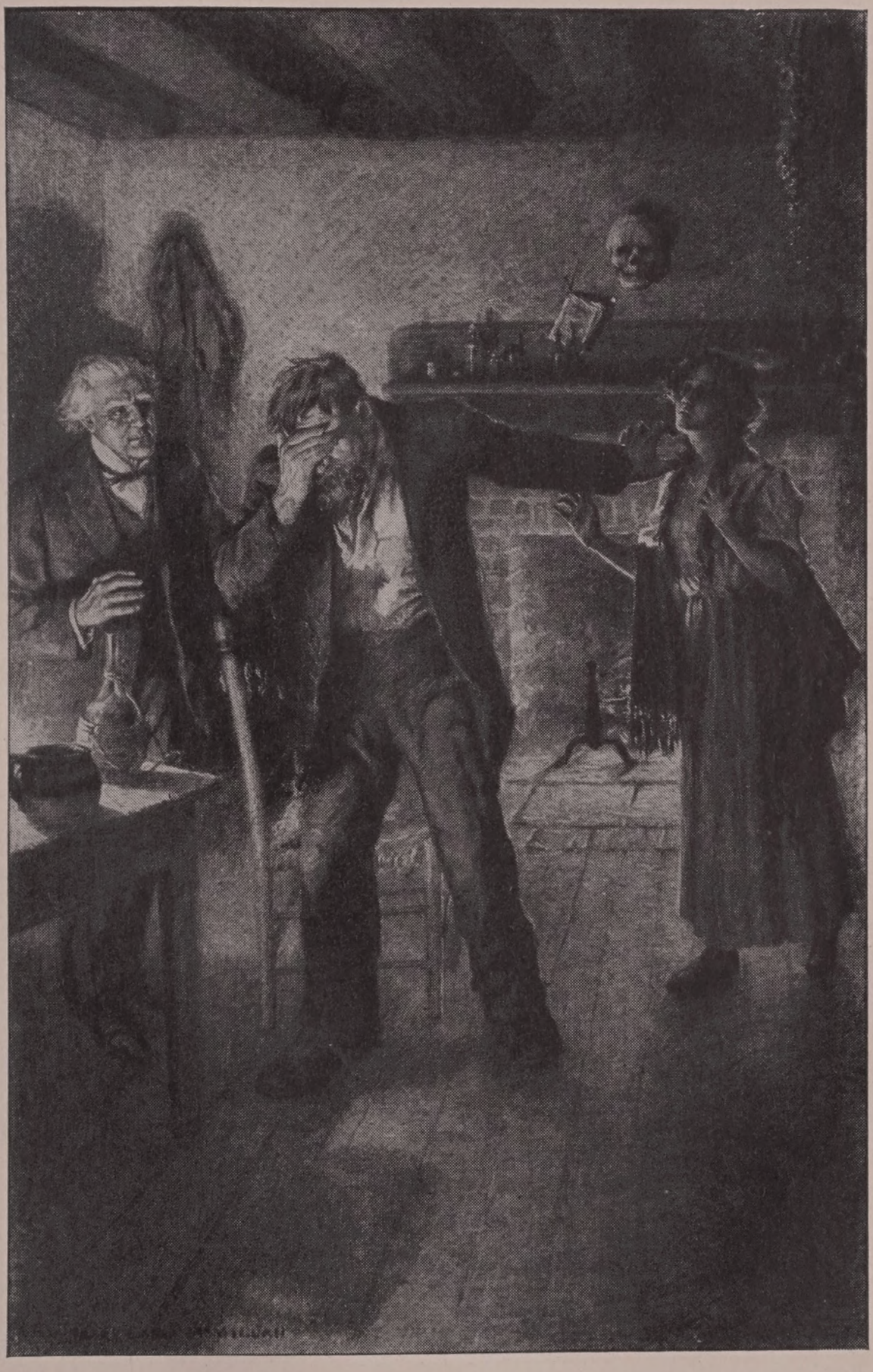
How could he wrest the girl from the power of Osper Camargo? It would be difficult in the extreme. With her mind so under the power of the sorcerer, counter-suggestions might be of very little effect. Was there no way in which the law could step in, so that this man's power of working evil would be fettered?

Perhaps there might be some hope of this if he could discover the ulterior purpose at which Camargo had hinted. His eye turned to the oaken chest, and at once he went over to it. In his excitement, Camargo had forgotten to take away the key.

Dr. Wycherley swiftly opened it and turned over the pile of garments, seeking for something hidden in the box which might give him a clue to the great ulterior motive. His hand brushed against parchment, and he drew it out and took it over to the light—a parchment yellow with age and written in faded ink with words of French many centuries old. But it was possible to get its general purport, even if single words here and there conveyed no meaning:

The Potion
Of Which Whosoever Shall Drink Shall
Become Immortal.

It was a lengthy recipe full of such ingredients as the eyes of bats, the powdered forehand of a toad, broth of blindworms, and others nauseating in the extreme,



"'Keep away from me, for I am accursed!'"

but the culmination of the recipe sent a chill of horror coursing down the doctor's spine. Though he had watched by the bedside of raving madmen, he had never had to listen to imaginings so devilish as this. His eye ran over it hurriedly before he thrust it into his pocket to bring if necessary before a court of law:

"*. . . a maiden undefiled, a first-born . . . when she is with child . . . an infusion of the spotted rye . . . the left eye and the right ear . . . see to it that you both drink the potion together . . .*"

Dr. Wycherley realised as never before the feelings of our ancestors when, centuries ago, they had had to deal with the sorcerers of their age. Small wonder that they had lynched at the stake men who put into practice what had been written on this old parchment. Small wonder that in their zeal to stamp out such devilish imaginings, they had persecuted the innocent as well as the guilty.

Outside the lightning flashed and the thunder tore across the swishing rain, but through the noise Dr. Wycherley sensed a footstep. He moved towards the door, but at the same moment the man on the bed stirred and rose up. He, too, had sensed the presence outside, the presence for which he in his trance was feverishly waiting.

Osper Camargo thrust back the doctor and strode to fling open the door. And as he did so, as he stepped out of the threshold to lay hand on the girl who had come at the call of the grey cat, a blinding flash of lightning, followed on the instant by the roar of thunder from directly overhead, struck upon him.

The sorcerer staggered back, his hands to his eyes, moaning horribly.

Groping, he blundered about the room, and a torrent of blasphemies poured from his lips as he realised what had come upon him. Then, little by little, the stream of imprecations died down, and as the girl moved to his side, shivering in her sodden clothes, Osper cried out pitifully, in a voice so changed from his previous tone that Dr. Wycherley started at it: "Keep away from me, for I am accursed! The judgment of God is upon me. He has struck me blind for my sins!"

He fell on his knees, and as from a little child there came from him the prayer of the Paternoster. One of those strange instantaneous conversions, the rationale of which is so veiled from us, had been witnessed. For a long hour, until exhaustion set in, the sorcerer laid bare his soul before his Maker and prayed for forgiveness. Let it be granted to him that he should work out his salvation in the cell of a monk, sworn to perpetual silence, and he would be content.

* * * * * * *

When the morning broke through the grey mists of the marshes, Dr. Wycherley and Jeanne Dorthez were leading by the hand over the marsh-path a blind man who murmured continuously the prayers he had learnt in his youth.

Behind them smoke curled up from the hut of the sorcerer that was. Dr. Wycherley had set fire to it so that the ghastly tokens and records it contained might never fall into the hands of any human being.

CHAPTER XII

A MAN'S HONOUR AT STAKE

IT would be a second judgment of Paris to have to choose between the rival claims of Isola Salvatore in spring, in summer and in autumn. Dr. Wycherley made no such attempt. He was content to watch the changing seasons in his beloved garden with the feeling that each was bringing to him a new unfolding of his children, the trees and shrubs and flowers. They grew up around him revealing new beauties, more perfect beauties, with each succeeding year.

But he was never content to rest at Isola Salvatore with his garden, his laboratory and his splendid library of psychological science if any call came for his services from outside. His real laboratory was the whole civilised world. Sometimes he would travel to seek new cases; sometimes they would come to him at his London consulting-room or at his island home.

It was one May that Sir Christopher Hemmerde travelled to Lake Rovellasco in order to consult the mental healer. The two men were seated in the garden under the wide-spread branches of a cypress from Cashmere, its weeping foliage blue-green like some giant cyanophyllous seaweed. To one side was a clump of Japanese bamboo so delicately, so ethereally green as

to vibrate with a song of youth eternal. Trailing high over a broad-leaved camphor tree from Celebes was a white Banksia rose in full flower, like a bevy of little children scrambling joyously over a good-natured uncle to find what toys and sweets he had brought for them in his many pockets.

"My honour is at stake," said Sir Christopher Hemmerde.

He sat very upright in the chair that had been placed for him—a broad-shouldered, full-blooded man of forty-eight, with a close-trimmed moustache and beard turning from brown to grey, with firm, authoritative look and the poise of a man of power. He was the head of the great banking and financial house of Hemmerde, Maddison and Co., Lothbury, London, E. C. His knighthood stood in recognition of his financial abilities and of the big sums he had given to prominent charities. In a few years' time he would, in the orderly progression of the mayoral candidature, become Lord Mayor of London, titular head of the greatest city in the world.

"A man's honour lies with himself and with his wife," answered Dr. Wycherley, with his little mannerism of veiling a question under a statement.

"In this case, with neither. The case is a most unusual one—a most delicate one. I am very loth to put it in the hands of a detective, and hearing of your peculiar powers of mind-reading, I have come to you."

Dr. Wycherley did not respond to this. Detective work was strongly distasteful to him unless it were to

open out fresh experiences in the realm of the human mind. He waited to hear further.

Sir Christopher continued, with more than a little self-importance: "My honour as a business man is involved. As you will know, in a business such as mine, matters are confided to the heads of the firm which must rigorously be kept secret. Now it has happened three times in the last twelve months that private information has leaked out from my office. This last time, it was information that precipitated the disastrous run on the Essex Bank. It is vital that I find the leak—and stop it."

"Surely that is a problem for a business expert," answered the doctor, somewhat coldly. Money matters held no interest whatever for him, and he resented the implication that he was being consulted as a kind of glorified detective, ready to sell his skill to any man for sufficiently high pay.

"No. Because I know that the leak can lie only with one of two men, my partner and my confidential secretary."

"That means three men—your partner, your secretary, and yourself."

"Naturally." The banker brushed aside the correction as of no consequence. "And I *must* know which."

"I am sorry, but the case is not one I should care to handle."

"Why not, sir?" The banker's face flushed; a vein throbbed angrily in his temple. "I have made a personal journey to Italy to consult you. The affair

is one of urgent importance. In a few years I shall in due course be elected to the office of Lord Mayor, and my business reputation is a matter of the utmost concern to myself and to . . . " He stopped short, having tangled his sentence.

" And to . . . ? " urged Dr. Wycherley.

" Well, if I must say it, to the City of London."

" Scarcely that, Sir Christopher. Of the utmost concern to yourself—yes. But to others—why? "

The banker suddenly felt small—a most unusual feeling for him. His hand fidgetted with his collar, and he cleared his throat uneasily.

" Is there no stronger reason why I should put my time and skill at your service? " continued the doctor.

" Well, I don't know if this reason would appeal to you. On my return to London I propose either to break with my life-long partner, or to dismiss my private secretary, whom I have helped and trusted since he was a lad. Probably it will be the latter, and yet he may be a perfectly innocent man."

" In other words, the honour of *three* men is involved. That is a stronger reason than your Lord Mayorship, Sir Christopher." The rebuke was gentle but pointed. " One question: there is always the possibility that secrets may leak out through a man's relations—have you eliminated that possibility? "

" In my case, I tell my business secrets to nobody—not even to my wife. I expect the same principle from my associates. If they confide my affairs to their relations, I consider that as criminal as open betrayal."

Dr. Wycherley accompanied the banker back to

London, but Sir Christopher felt considerably disappointed in him. He had expected to find a man who could read his every thought at a glance. He had rather expected to buy ready-made miracles at (say) a hundred guineas apiece, with a five per cent discount for cash. He did not realise that the psychic sense of the mental healer required very peculiar conditions for its highest effort, and that it was out of the question to ask him for miraculous readings at any arbitrary moment.

Sir Christopher was grimed with money, and the temperament of the scientist was outside his range of comprehension.

Proceeding by branch lines, they caught the night express at Lugano, and shared a *wagon-lit* over the St. Gothard route, and so by Basle and Chalons to Calais-Dover and London. On the journey, Dr. Wycherley outlined his plan of action:

"I shall want to study Mr. Maddison and Mr. West when they are off guard. That is essential. On guard, a man can control his thoughts—put armour around them. I make no pretension to cope with a mind-armoured man."

"Yes?" said Hemmerde coldly. This scientific freakness made no appeal to him. He would have been much more impressed by the boastings of a charlatan. What he looked for, in fact, was a modern Cagliostro or Nostradamus. Dr. Wycherley realised that to the full, but he had no intention of degrading his science by any cheap and flashy impressiveness.

"Shakespeare has given us the model for this case,"

pursued the doctor. "Hamlet—the play scene. Hamlet studying the King while the mimic drama is being enacted before them. Is there a play now on in London where the conditions resemble yours?"

The banker thought over this for a little.

"There is a play of Henri Bernstein's called 'The Thief.' I have not seen it, but I understand that the plot hinges on a theft of money at a country house, and that everyone of the house party is under suspicion. But that is hardly a good analogy to my case."

"It may serve. Will you engage a first-circle box?"

"For us four?"

"For you three. I shall sit in a dress-circle seat convenient for observation. Between the acts I may come to you."

"Perhaps it would be less suspicious if I ask Lady Hemmerde to give the invitation?"

"As you please."

"You will stay with us, of course?"

"After the test—yes. But not before. My presence in London ought not to be known."

"The Thief," that big success of the Paris, London and New York stages, was just starting its run at the St. James' Theatre, with George Alexander and Irene Vanbrugh in the chief parts. In his usual scientific thoroughness, Dr. Wycherley made a matinée visit to the play in order to familiarise himself with the plot and its developments before the evening of the arranged theatre-party. He was thus in a position to give undivided attention to the occupants of the first-circle box.

In the two front seats sat Lady Hemmerde and Angus Maddison, Sir Christopher's partner. Behind were Sir Christopher himself and West, his confidential secretary.

Lady Hemmerde was decidedly plain. In spite of her position as the wife of a great banker, she looked a timid, colourless, insignificant little woman, more fitted to act as hostess in a suburban drawing-room than at the Mansion House, which would in due course be her duty. Not knowing that she had been an heiress, and that her whole fortune had been turned over to the banker, Dr. Wycherley wondered why Sir Christopher had married her. It was evident at a glance that she was not a woman to whom the masterful banker would confide the secrets of his business.

Angus Maddison interested the doctor very greatly. He was a tall, lean, sandy Scotchman with keen, quick-moving eyes and an exceptionally keen intellect. The somewhat conscious self-importance of Sir Christopher was entirely absent. Dr. Wycherley docketted him as a self-made man and the brains of the firm.

West, the secretary, formed a complete contrast. He was the typical employee—a man born to lean on others, a man born to carry out orders. The doctor noted the slight deferential droop of the shoulders as he sat beside his employer and benefactor, evidently much flattered by the honour of the evening's invitation.

Previous to the rising of the curtain, the doctor had injected into himself a drug—one of the pyridyl-novocaine derivatives—which has the peculiar effect of temporarily paralysing the auditory nerve. It renders a

man deaf for a period of time dependent on the strength of the dose. In this way he screened out of his consciousness the spoken traffic of the stage, and allowed his brain to concentrate on the delicate waves of thought. The action and gestures of the players would tell him at any time of the developments of the plot, so that he could synchronise them with the thoughts they aroused in the minds of the people he was so intently watching.

The doctor leant back in his balcony stall with every muscle relaxed, concentrating on his mental task.

The first act of " The Thief " is merely introductory —a prelude to the great second act, a bedroom scene in which a husband worms out of his wife a confession of her theft. The drama of this second act gripped the whole house to straining tenseness. To look on the rows of faces behind and around one was to realise that the spectators were living in a mimic world forgetful of realities—were living through every emotion of the guilty wife and the horror-stricken husband. When at length the curtain fell on the second act, there was a perceptible interval of silence before the spectators came back to a remembrance that this was acting and that the actors were waiting for their recognition.

Of the whole house there was perhaps not one except Dr. Wycherley who did not then break into heartfelt applause. But the doctor sat silent, working out the significance of the real-life drama which had been unfolded to his keen senses.

* * * * * * *

At the close of the play, when the effect of his injection had worn off, Dr. Wycherley made his way to the first-circle box. Sir Christopher introduced him to the three members of his party, and all five drove in the banker's limousine to his sombre, dignified house in Manchester Square, where supper was served them before they separated for the night.

The conversation, limited to surface conventionalities, held little of interest until the supper-party had broken up and Sir Christopher and the doctor were alone in the library.

"Well?" said the former, his tone showing a suppressed impatience for the results of the doctor's investigation. "Have you discovered anything?"

"Yes—part of the truth."

"Who is the betrayer?"

Dr. Wycherley picked out a cigarette from an open box, turning his head away as he did so.

"I know the betrayer," he answered quietly, "but I do not yet know the reason for the betrayal."

"That's of little consequence."

"I am not so sure. It may be of very great consequence."

"Be good enough to tell me what you have discovered, and I shall then be in a position to judge."

"I would prefer to wait a little, Sir Christopher."

The banker flushed angrily. Clearly he was not accustomed to having his wishes thwarted. He twitched at his collar as though his nerves were not under control.

"Explain yourself, sir!"

Dr. Wycherley, struck by a sudden thought, took

up a green-shaded electric lamp from a table near by and held it up so that its light fell full on the banker's face.

"Please be still for a moment," he ordered. "I want to examine you."

The surprise of the action held the banker speechless for a moment.

"Have you ever suffered from nerve derangement?"

"I? But . . . ! Whatever has this to do with my own question?"

"Possibly a good deal. Have you ever consulted a nerve specialist?"

"Never! Why should I? I'm perfectly healthy."

Dr. Wycherley replaced the lamp on its table. His studious silence made direct contradiction to Sir Christopher's statement.

"You think I ought to have my nerves looked into?" faltered the banker.

"I should certainly advise it."

"Then will . . . will you examine me?"

"I am here not as a doctor but as a detective," answered the mental healer. "That was, I think, the rôle you assigned to me. I will therefore give you the name of a nerve specialist, and I would strongly advise you to call on him to-morrow."

He scribbled a name and address on a sheet of paper, and handed it to Sir Christopher.

"But—the betrayer? Am I to infer . . . ? You surely do not mean to suggest that I, that I myself . . . ? It's absurd! Preposterous! Unbelievable!"

"I think we had better leave further discussion of this matter until after you have seen the specialist," returned Dr. Wycherley with gentle decisiveness. "Meanwhile, it grows late. Shall we say good-night?"

He held out his hand and took leave of his host.

In his bedroom, Sir Christopher opened the communicating door of their rooms in order to talk to his wife while undressing.

"That queer-looking man I brought home to-night tells me I ought to see a nerve specialist," he growled, not troubling himself with a courteous tone of voice in addressing his wife. "Rubbish! Sheer rubbish! . . . Have you noticed anything wrong about me?"

If he could have seen his wife at the moment of that question, he would have seen her turn white and trembling. But there was a wall between them. She answered timidly: "I don't know. I think perhaps . . . perhaps it would be well for you to see the specialist."

Hemmerde strode into his wife's room.

"What's wrong with me?" he demanded.

"Nothing, dear, nothing!" she hastened to reply. "But just as a matter of precaution, perhaps it would be as well . . . At your age."

Hemmerde made no answer to this. He finished his undressing and went to bed, but before retiring he started the mechanism of a roll-cylinder phonograph in the bedroom. This was to play him to sleep. He had found that it soothed his nerves, and it had now become an established habit of his.

Soon he was sleeping stertorously.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ONE WHO BETRAYED

AT eleven o'clock the next morning Dr. Wycherley went to call at Manchester Square. As he expected, Sir Christopher was away at business —or perhaps at the Harley Street consultant's. The doctor then asked to see Lady Hemmerde.

She came to him in the great ornate drawing-room, furnished with ponderous decorative effect like some state apartment in a show palace. It was not a woman's room, but a man's—clearly Sir Christopher himself had chosen the furnishings. In this huge room Lady Hemmerde looked even more insignificant and inconsequential than the evening before—a timid, colourless little woman to outward seeming.

But Dr. Wycherley had read deeper into her.

"I had no opportunity of speaking to you alone last night," he began, "so I have taken upon myself to call at this unusual hour. Will you excuse me?"

"Of course—I am always very pleased to welcome any friend of my husband's. Won't you sit down?" answered Lady Hemmerde with colourless conventionality.

"Last night I was acting in your interests," continued the doctor, "and I want you to know how and why."

"You mean about advising my husband to see a specialist?"

"Yes."

"I told him that it might be as well to take your advice."

"That, Lady Hemmerde, was merely a side issue."

"I don't understand."

"I will explain. But first, let me assure you that what I am going to ask is in no way a prying into your private affairs." The doctor's voice held a world of gentle sympathy. "I do not presume to set myself up as judge. I only want to understand. Tell me this: why did you give away that private knowledge of your husband's which led to the ruin of the Essex Bank?"

Lady Hemmerde quivered like a bird in the hand of a captor. Her cheeks went chalk-white. But she answered:

"You must be making some great mistake. My husband tells me nothing of his private affairs."

"True—but yet you know of them. I will tell you how you know. Sir Christopher travelled to Italy to consult me, and we came back together in a night express. We shared a *wagon-lit* compartment. I then discovered that Sir Christopher talks in his sleep."

"No doubt. But your inference is altogether wrong. My husband and I—I really don't know why I should be telling you these details—my husband and I occupy separate rooms."

There was fire in her words now; she was a woman at bay.

Dr. Wycherley realised that he had failed to make the sympathy contact—that Lady Hemmerde suspected him of hostile intentions. He therefore tried once more to gain her confidence.

"You believe that I am here to accuse you; but, on the contrary, I am here to shield you. Your husband has no suspicion whatever—*at present*—that you have become aware of his business secrets. I have not told him—nor do I wish to tell him. Come, Lady Hemmerde, look close at me and read my sincerity. . . . I know—*I know*—that you learnt from him of the perilous condition of the Essex Bank. I know that you gave it away to someone else. Why you should have done so is frankly inexplicable to me. Your motive is beyond me. Such a betrayal seems altogether opposed to your true self. . . . There must have been some overwhelming reason."

"I tell you again, you are utterly mistaken," she retorted with set lips.

Dr. Wycherley rose quietly and took up his hat.

"You leave me only one inference," he said. "I shall have to report to Sir Christopher this: that if he did not give away his business affairs in his sleep to you, it must have been to—some other woman."

A bitter cry came from Lady Hemmerde: "You are merciless!"

"As a surgeon is merciless."

"Why do you persist in doubting my word? Am I a woman who would betray my own?"

And with that the key to the mystery lay in Dr. Wycherley's hand.

"No, you are not! I see now that you are trying to protect not yourself but someone dear to you. *It is the mother instinct.*"

He had at last touched the right chord. There were tears in her eyes as she cried:

"Can't you see that I've been trying to protect *him?*"

"Whom?"

"My husband!"

Very gently Dr. Wycherley answered:

"Then I am indeed intruding. I ask your forgiveness. I will leave now, and you will not see me again. I shall return at once to my home in Italy."

"No, stay—listen first to what I have to tell. You have divined so much that you had best know all. Sit down and I will tell you. Perhaps you will be able to help me."

She dried her tears and began with a new trust and hope in her voice:

"I have no children, and the mother instinct in me has gone out to my husband. He thinks that he needs no one's help, but I have always been at his elbow without his knowing it, from the day of my marriage when my whole fortune passed into his hands. I have borne him no children, and he seems to feel that he owes nothing to me. . . .

"Two years ago we were in Brussels. One night he left me to go to a theatre—so he said. He did not return to the hotel until six o'clock the next morning. He did not know that I knew, and I said nothing.

"When we returned to London a man and a woman

called here one afternoon and asked to see me. She said . . . she said . . . I can't repeat to you what it was she said. It was blackmail. They had even taken a photograph of my husband—a horrible, disgraceful photograph. They wanted money, and I was frightened and gave them what I had in return for a promise of silence."

"I understand now," said Dr. Wycherley gently. "In order that your husband's reputation might be saved—in order that he might become Lord Mayor of London without an open stain on his character—you paid hush-money. Once you had paid, their demands became heavier . . . "

"And at last I had not money enough to satisfy them. As I told you, my whole fortune went to my husband at marriage. . . . So I had to pay them in another way. They suggested that I should give them business information which could be turned into money. Every time they said it was to be the last demand, and every time they lied!"

"You need not tell me more."

"You had best know all. . . . My husband has a peculiar fancy for a phonograph to play him to sleep, and his machine is always in his bedroom at night. One evening, after dinner, we amused ourselves by taking records of our own voices, and amongst those records was one of Mr. Angus Maddison's voice, my husband's partner. . . . I know that Christopher very often muttered a great deal in his sleep. It has something to do, I think, with a hidden nervous affection of his."

"Yes, there would be a decided connection."

"One night, driven to desperation, the thought came to me to creep into Christopher's room and place in the machine the record of Mr. Maddison's voice. I did so, and as soon as he heard it, Christopher began to answer and talk of confidential business matters. And that was how I came to learn his secrets. . . ."

"My dear Lady Hemmerde, I feel more than ever an intruder."

"Can't you help me?" she pleaded.

"I can only advise you to tell your husband everything—*everything*. He must defend his own honour in the way that seems best to him. . . . I wish I could indeed help you, but like every other man I have my many limitations. . . . A man's honour lies with himself and with his wife. You have done what lay in your power to protect him; now he must stand by himself. He must be awakened."

There was the sound of a motor drawing up by the front door.

"That will be your husband. I will say good-bye now. Good-bye, and courage!"

On the doorstep Dr. Wycherley came face to face with Sir Christopher.

"Well, sir?" demanded the latter. "When am I to hear the results?"

"Your wife is waiting to tell you," said the mental healer.

"Shall I see you later in the day?"

"I have an important call to Cambridge."

"But . . . !"

"Your wife is waiting for you, Sir Christopher."

CHAPTER XIV

ACCIDENT OR MURDER

THE sudden call to Cambridge was in connection with the University department of experimental psychology and psychiatry, then being re-organised. Dr. Wycherley's European reputation in the science of the mind had led to his being invited to Cambridge by the Senate to give his opinion on the new plans, and at the same time to deliver a short series of lectures to the medical faculty of the University.

As a general rule, the doctor hated lectures. Speaking to human beings in the mass means having to address oneself to an average intelligence, to average prejudices and average sympathies—while Dr. Wycherley was at his best in dealing with the *individual* intelligence, prejudices or sympathies. He almost preferred the trouble of speaking to fifty people separately to the ineffectiveness of addressing them *en masse*. Public addresses constrained him, and he had a little touch of human vanity which made him disagreeably conscious that lectures did not do him justice.

However, in this case he had consented to speak because it was an unique opportunity to hit out from the shoulder at the conservatism of the British medical profession in general and the 'Varsity don in particular.

Oxford and Cambridge were at that time, as regards mind-conscience, far behind the schools and clinics of the Continent and the States. He intended to tell Cambridge so in words that they would probably never forgive but certainly would never forget.

This series of lectures, arresting in their boldness if unpalatable to the majority of his audience, kept Dr. Wycherley in the University city from the end of May to the end of June. It was thus that he came indirectly in contact with the mysterious death of Professor Creighton Adams, which took place during "Mays Week." The tragic occurrence was heightened by its contrast with the joyous festivities of that glorious week when Cambridge is a kaleidoscope of flannel-clad young heroes and dainty English girlhood, with the requisite escort of parents and aunts and uncles; when the days and nights are a whirl of luncheon parties and riverings, dances and suppers, flirtations and quickly-born romances.

Professor Creighton Adams had been found in a huddled heap on the floor of the "sloth room" in the Cambridge Biological Museum shortly after nine o'clock on the morning of Thursday, June 4th. Weston, the museum attendant, had discovered the body when he unlocked the doors of the museum and was proceeding with the routine of his morning duties.

The corpse was cold and stark, set in a death rigor for many hours past. That the cause of death was strangulation, Weston saw at a glance. The claw-marks around the neck carried their own grim tale.

Weston gave the alarm at once. The doors of the

museum were closed, and police and doctor were at once sent for. White-faced in spite of his service in the Army and his record at the shambles of Dargai, the attendant led them to the huddled form lying in the silence of the sloth room, surrounded by cases of skeletons, mounted specimens in the open, and many oddments relative to the animal group of tree-sloths and ground-sloths.

This room—on the ground floor—was in the making. It was the special domain of Professor Adams, who had a world-wide reputation in the morphology and physiology of the South American fauna. In fact, the specimens in the unfinished room were largely his own spoils from the expedition to the Upper Amazon which he had headed with such striking success a year previously. He had brought back in particular several hides, skeletons and preserved limbs of a new giant sloth hitherto unknown to science. It was closely allied to the monster fossil sloths of the pleistocene epoch, though only half their size. Still, a formidable beast some five feet in length.

Professor Adams had also managed by unusual good luck to bring a living specimen of his new find back to Cambridge. In order to study its habits closely, he kept it caged in one room of his private research suite, also on the ground floor.

Scarcely had the group of officials reached the dead body of the professor, when loud cries for help echoed through the building from a room somewhere below them. Most of them rushed towards the stone stair-

case leading to the basement, and down the steps, pell-mell, in the direction of the sounds.

It was in the whale room that they found Haines, a laboratory assistant, battering fiercely with a chair at the heaving, palpitating body of a giant sloth. He had managed to split its skull, and blood was streaming over the grey fur—patched with blue-green from the algæ which curiously make their habitation on the bodies of the sloths, like mould on the trunks of trees.

The limbs, armed with vicious curved triple claws, splayed around in the animal's death agony. Then it rolled over on the floor and lay still. Haines, a man of fifty odd, panting stertorously from the terror of the fight, gasped out broken words of explanation:

"Brute was hiding . . . in here . . . flew at me . . . muster got loose . . . somehow . . . vicious beast!"

"He's killed the professor."

"Killed the . . . professor! . . . Good God!"

"How did it get loose?" This from the inspector of police.

Haines looked at him speechlessly for a moment. Then the answer: "How should I know?"

Arthur Lethbridge, a demonstrator of zoölogy and a co-worker with the dead professor, put in a word: "The cage is on the floor above, in the research rooms."

The group went quickly upstairs to inspect the iron-barred cage. Then they were joined by the doctor, who had been examining the corpse minutely.

"Professor Adams has been dead some nine or ten

hours," he said. "The animal must have broken loose last night."

But it was not a case of *breaking* loose. The inspector pointed out that the lock was intact, and that the animal must have simply pushed up the bar of the cage-door, swung it open, and walked out. It must be by some oversight that the key had not been turned in the lock.

"Who has the key of the cage?" asked the inspector.

Weston replied: "The professor always kept it himself. Sometimes he'd go into the cage and pet the animal. A mad thing to do, I call it."

They went back to the body, and the inspector searched the pockets of the dead man for the key. He found it on a ring with some other keys of the laboratories, and was replacing the bunch when young Mrs. Adams burst in upon them.

The scene of grief that followed was painful in the extreme, and the group of men tiptoed away until the inspector of police alone was left with her. This beautiful, frail young girl had been married only two months to the professor. Last night, when he had been working late at the museum, she had been dancing at one of the many college balls of "Mays Week." His death must have taken place while the gaiety was at its height. The thought of that contrast stabbed her with remorse. In the agony of the moment she magnified her very natural love of gaiety to a callous heartlessness. She tortured herself with the thought that if she had stayed

at home, and he with her, this tragedy would never have occurred.

The inspector remained respectfully silent until the grief-stricken girl addressed to him a broken question:

"When . . . how . . . how did it happen?"

The inspector explained the facts to her as he knew them, concluding with: "It looks, madam, as if the professor must have left the cage unlocked by accident."

Then it was that Blanche Adams burst out with her passionate accusation:

"I don't believe it! Someone let the animal loose! My husband has been murdered!"

* * * * * * *

While the tragedy had aroused Dr. Wycherley's interest, in view of Mrs. Adams' impassioned accusation, he was not directly concerned in the matter until one evening in late June when his gyp brought him a card with the inscription: "J. Hammerton Clark. Scotland Yard."

The doctor occupied temporarily a suite of those rooms in Neville's Court, Trinity, which are reserved for distinguished guests of the college. He gave orders to have the detective shown in to the oak-panelled study where he was now engaged in drafting out his final lecture of the series.

J. Hammerton Clark was a man of consequence in his own world, and his manner showed that he realised it to the full. He had the inquisitorial eyes of the cross-examining counsel, a dark moustache curtaining

the expression of his mouth, and an authoritative bearing. In age he was something under forty.

"Well, sir," he began, and the inflexion on the word "sir" was that of equal addressing equal, "you are no doubt wondering why a Scotland Yard man should be calling on you?"

"For help," returned the doctor with his quiet smile. "This is not the first time I have been approached by the police."

A shade disconcerted, the detective continued: "No doubt you know that we Scotland Yard men can't interfere in these country murders until the county police definitely call us in. By the time I arrived here, the local people had bungled the Adams case into a horrible mess."

"Quite probable. But why should you expect me to be interested in such a matter? I have many duties of my own to attend to, and, frankly, police work as such makes no appeal to me."

"This case *will* interest you, sir," answered J. Hammerton Clark boldly, though the word "sir" was now inflected as from one addressing a superior.

"Why, pray?"

"I went to your last lecture. A fine lecture, that! As a practical man, I thoroughly agree with what you said about the neglect in England of psychology in relation to crime."

Dr. Wycherley would have been less than human if he had not been inwardly gratified at this appreciation.

"Well?" he asked. "Why should this case specially appeal to me?"

"Because the one break in my chain is the criminal's *motive*. The murder seems purposeless."

"You are certain that it was murder and not accident?"

"No. I'll be perfectly open with you. If I can't find a motive for the crime, I shall have to let it go as accident."

"Then you want me to help you run some man's neck into the hangman's noose?"

"Remember, sir, 'Every unpunished crime is the parent of further crime,'" quoted the detective from a standard legal work. He continued slyly: "It may interest you to know that the criminal is at the present moment in Neville's Court."

The doctor pushed aside the draft notes of his lecture, and J. Hammerton Clark knew that at last he had secured complete attention.

"Would you like me to give you a resumé of the case as I see it?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Professor Adams was a brilliant, erratic genius," began the detective. "He appears to have kept women strictly out of his life until the age of forty-six. On his forty-sixth birthday he suddenly married a young girl of twenty-two. She is fond of gaiety, and the balls of 'Mays Week' keep her steadily enjoying herself. On the evening in question, the professor resolves to make a night of it in his museum . . ."

Dr. Wycherley frowned a little at this flippant way of stating the case, and the detective, quick to notice expressions, sobered his words.

" . . . to work late over his zoölogical specimens. Someone who knows of this resolve borrows the professor's bunch of keys on some pretext or other; unlocks the door of the cage where the giant sloth is kept; returns the keys; and then goes away in the full expectation that the beast will break loose and attack the professor."

" I understood that Professor Adams made a pet of the animal," commented the doctor. " Why should it attack him? "

" Probably the animal was stirred up in some way by the man who let it loose. However, that's a detail. The main point is this: who stood to gain by the murder of the professor? What was the motive of the crime? I went first on the usual *cherchez la femme.* Mrs. Adams, a young girl who might certainly be described as ' beautiful,' would have had other admirers besides a professor forty-six years old. I found out that Mr. Arthur Lethbridge had been greatly attracted by her at one time. She refused him . . . "

The detective paused to give dramatic point to his words, then continued:

" I look at Mr. Lethbridge, a dreamy, meditative young fellow, highly cultured, highly sensitive, a member of the Eugenics League, a man who has worked hand in hand with the professor for some years past— and I ask myself what on earth he could expect to gain by the professor's death. A man like that could never bring himself to propose marriage to a woman whose husband he had murdered."

" Your next suspect? "

"My next suspect was Haines, the laboratory assistant. A week before his death, Professor Adams had given this fellow a violent dressing-down for disturbing some museum cases. Haines had denied doing this. I look at Haines, a man of fifty-two with a blameless record for twenty years and more at the 'Varsity laboratories, married, happy in his children and his home-life, even tempered, and I ask myself how this man could bring himself to murder the professor in revenge for a mere slanging."

"Your third suspect?"

"My third was a Brazilian student named Ramon Zalazar, a post-graduate man specialising in zoölogy. He accompanied Professor Adams on that expedition he made to the interior of Brazil. Zalazar is a young man of a fiery, passionate, typically Latin temperament. I tried to connect him with Mrs. Adams, and my enquiries came to nothing. I worked on the theory of revenge, and all my enquiries tended to show that Zalazar and the professor were on excellent terms. I look at the young man, and I ask myself what hidden motive there could be for turning loose a wild beast on a friend."

"These three men could all have been in the museum on the evening of the accident or murder?" queried the doctor.

"Yes. The peculiarity of the case is that the criminal need not have been in the building at the time of the death. It is quite possible that he may have released the animal hours before it attacked the professor.

That has made it extremely difficult for me to fix suspicion on any one man on a time consideration."

"But you said that the criminal is now in Neville's Court?"

"Both Lethbridge and Zalazar have rooms around this court, and it happened that as I came across the quadrangle I saw Haines going to the staircase where Lethbridge lives—probably with some message. In other words, the criminal is within a stone's throw of us, because my suspects have narrowed down to those three alone."

"Always assuming murder and not accident."

The detective nodded assent. "My case is practically hopeless unless I can fix the motive. It would give me a new starting-point. That's why I've come to you, sir. This case is one for a trained psychologist, and especially for a man of your known powers."

Dr. Wycherley made a gesture of deprecation. "People weave fairy-tales around my powers. There is nothing supernatural about them. . . . However, I will try what I can sense or deduce. Can you show me the scene of the supposed crime?"

"Now, if you wish it. The museum and research rooms are closed, but I have a complete set of duplicate keys. Now would be the finest time to go over the ground, because Professor Adams was killed somewhere between ten and eleven o'clock at night."

* * * * * * *

All traces of the tragedy had long since been cleared away from the sloth room, which had been

completed by Arthur Lethbridge according to the dead man's plans, and was now thrown open to the general student. But the professor's own research room, and the small room in which he had kept the caged animal, were still very much as they were on the morning of June 4th. Dust had settled over furniture and books, over microscope and bell-jars and gas-oven and rocker microtome, over desk and papers. In one corner lay the broken fragments of a large flower-bowl, with long-dead flowers scattered around.

Dr. Wycherley pointed to it questioningly.

"Professor Adams was a man of hasty temper," answered the detective.

Another thought arose. "Were any of his private papers taken?"

"As far as we know, they were not. But it's impossible to say definitely."

"Will you leave me alone in this room for, say, half an hour?"

The detective withdrew, and Dr. Wycherley, switching off the lights and placing himself in the dead man's desk-chair, gave himself up to that state of intense receptivity in which the radiations of outside thought came clearest to his inner senses. Professor Adams had worked in this room for years past, and some faint echo of his thoughts and feelings might linger—might still make itself evident to the consciousness of the mental healer as the characteristic scent of the man might still make itself felt to the keen nose of a hound.

The detective, returning at the end of the half-hour, found Dr. Wycherley in a rigid, semi-hypnotic condi-

tion. After some hesitation, he decided to rouse the doctor.

He touched him gently on the shoulder, and the doctor woke with a start, blinking as one who comes out of heavy sleep.

"Well, sir," asked the detective eagerly, "have you arrived at any conclusion?"

Dr. Wycherley remained silent for some considerable time, gathering together the impressions that had come to him during his hypnotic doze.

"Here is a conclusion you are welcome to," he answered at length. "A man who borrows keys from the professor in order to loose the animal, *on the off-chance of its attacking and killing the professor*, would be a half-hearted amateur of a criminal."

J. Hammerton Clark could scarcely conceal his disappointment. This was a deduction he had himself reached long ago; and after Dr. Wycherley's impressive procedure, the results seemed ludicrously trivial.

"Let us go on to the scene of the death," pursued the doctor, and the detective led the way to the sloth room, though now his faith in Dr. Wycherley's "powers" had shrunken woefully.

After the details of the finding of the body had been explained to him, the doctor again asked to be left alone for a half-hour. The detective withdrew with a slightly contemptuous smile under his dark moustache.

When he returned, it was to find that Dr. Wycherley had already awakened from his hypnotic doze, and

was now examining the specimens in the cases and in the open with an absorbed interest.

"Any further conclusion?" asked Clark.

"Yes. There was no half-hearted amateur concerned in the professor's death," was the somewhat casual answer, and then, with a flash of the scientist's enthusiasm: "Have you ever seen a more complete and more excellently arranged collection of any animal group? Full mounted specimens, skeletons, hides, limbs, claws, comparisons of hair, charts of geographical distribution, internal organs, diagrams—complete down to the last detail. Splendid!"

"The professor was a genius for detail, no doubt," returned the detective with a bored shrug of his shoulders. "But I can't pretend to be interested in that sort of thing. Those specimens have nothing to do with my case, and as far as I'm concerned, they don't exist. It's getting very late, and if you'll allow me, I'll be returning to my hotel soon."

"I, too, must be getting to my rooms. Let us come away."

When the two men were parting company, the disappointed detective put one last perfunctory question:

"Then I suppose you can offer no suggestion as to motive, if it were a crime and not an accident?"

"The motive is beyond me," returned the doctor.

CHAPTER XV

BETWEEN A MAN AND HIS CONSCIENCE

DR. WYCHERLEY had spoken literal truth in saying that the motive was beyond him, but the method of the crime was vividly before him, and his thoughts were full of this and the deductions it involved.

"No half-hearted amateur was concerned in the professor's death," he had said to Clark, knowing that the man who had planned the murder had done so with a deliberation of purpose that was as cold as the stern justice of the law, and with a thoroughness that was scientific to the last degree.

The murderer of Professor Adams was a scientist. Haines could definitely be put aside from the case. He could never have planned such a crime. Of the two remaining, Lethbridge and Zalazar, who was the man? The clear course was for the doctor to see each of them in private, and fortified by his new knowledge of the case—knowledge unknown to Hammerton Clark—to force a confession.

Dr. Wycherley was now intensely interested in the case—as a psychologist. The motive of the crime puzzled him, and motives, the mainsprings of human action, were the material of his own scientific province. He

had dismissed the detective in order that no bungling hand should make the dissection. For the time being, Dr. Wycherley the humanitarian was completely blanketed behind Dr. Wycherley the scientist.

It was near midnight when he reached Neville's Court, with its open quadrangle flooded with full moonlight and its cloisters dark with slumbrous shadow. A number of lights from open windows showed that men were still studying or revelling. Term would close in a few days' time, and then all Neville's Court would lie sleeping, save for the activities of gyps and bedmakers, until Long Vacation brought a few of the studious-minded back for quiet work.

Dr. Wycherley went round the cloisters reading the names painted in white at the foot of the narrow oaken stairways, so that he might know where Lethbridge and Zalazar "kept." Then he stepped out into the open quadrangle to find if either, or both, of the two men were still showing a light in their windows. As it happened, lights streamed out from the living-rooms of both; and Arthur Lethbridge was at a window-seat enjoying the coolness of the night-air as he pencilled industriously in a notebook.

The doctor recognised the young demonstrator from the brief description that the detective had given, and it seemed that chance was pointing to a visit to Lethbridge first. If that visit drew blank, the doctor would then call on the Brazilian.

It was characteristic of Dr. Wycherley that no question of his own personal safety entered his thoughts. For the purpose of discussing the crime, he was going

to call on two men, one of whom had committed a particularly cold-blooded murder; yet the doctor took no precaution for his own safeguard. He simply went upstairs to the rooms of the first man, and knocked at the outer oak.

Lethbridge came to the door—a young man of twenty-eight, clean-cut, muscular, upright, with curious dreamy eyes that seemed to look beyond one into the future.

"What is it?" he asked quietly.

"I must apologise for disturbing you at this late hour. My name is Wycherley. I am temporarily occupying rooms in this court. I happen to be needing a quotation from Hartwell and Stevens' 'Mammalia,' and I judged that you would probably have a copy."

"Certainly, Doctor. I know you by reputation, of course. Please come in."

Lethbridge led the way to his sitting-room, indicated a chair, and handed to the doctor the two bulky volumes of the work in question, together with a pad of scribbling-paper.

There was a silence for some little while as Dr. Wycherley turned to the chapter on the sloth family, and pencilled some notes.

Then he remarked as he closed the volume: "I was at the museum to-day viewing some of the specimens. Allow me to congratulate you on the splendid display in the new sloth room. I understand it has been laid out by yourself."

"No credit is due to me," returned the young demonstrator. "I simply followed out the late profes-

sor's plans. His thoroughness in such matters amounted to genius."

"I gather that his genius had its counterweight in a highly erratic temperament."

"He had his fits of anger."

"Did it ever strike you that there was more in such outbursts than mere irritability?"

Lethbridge was sitting on the broad window-seat, his back against a cushion at one end, his feet up at the other, re-filling his pipe. He put in a few last threads of the light gold flake with meticulous care, and replied: "One made allowances, and avoided him on his irritable days."

"Did it ever strike you that the professor was on the verge of insanity?" pursued the doctor, and his keen eyes were fixed searchingly on the profile of the young man silhouetted at the window-seat.

Lethbridge put down his feet and turned squarely towards his questioner. "What makes you think that?"

"I know it. I was alone in his room for half-an-hour to-day, and the thoughts of the dead man were still surging and echoing in it. A tangled maze of thoughts coloured with what I recognise as dangerous abnormality."

"Professor Adams is dead," responded the young man with slow and meaning emphasis. "I was his friend and his wife's friend. The whole subject is a painful one to me. Need we discuss it further?"

"As his friend and his wife's friend," answered the

doctor firmly, " you owe it to him to help in the bringing to light of his murderer."

" The death was pure accident! "

" You are sure? "

" Everyone knows it except these pig-headed policemen. Can you imagine a would-be murderer borrowing keys from the professor in order to turn loose the animal, on the mere *chance* of the animal killing him? Suppose that had not happened—that the sloth had merely attacked the professor without killing him? Why, the man who let the animal loose would be instantly known! "

" Precisely. Most unscientific."

" That, to my mind, clinches the matter. It was one of those accidents that no one can foresee."

" To my mind also it would clinch the matter, were it not that I know something further—something unknown to the police, something known only to two men, myself and the man who planned the crime."

" What? "

" That the professor was never attacked by the animal at all."

" But the claw-marks on the neck! "

" The professor was strangled by a pair of specimen sloth-claws in the hands of the criminal. He was no half-hearted bungler. He made deadly sure of his work. He killed the professor first, and released the animal later."

" God! What cold-blooded work! . . . But how could you guess this? "

" I was alone in the sloth room for a further half-

hour, in a self-induced hypnosis. In that state of mind I am very often able to sense what is beyond the range of the ordinary sense-organs. I had the most vivid impression—not a vision in the ordinary meaning of the term, but an impression on the psychic plane—that a man had hidden, close to where I was sitting, with an absolutely fixed determination to kill the professor with his own hands. Not a surge of revengeful anger; not a blaze of jealous passion; but a cold determination like the stern justice of the law. That is the nearest description I can give you to the impression stamped on my mind."

Lethbridge was leaning forward now in keen eagerness to hear every word of the doctor's. "But in this vision, or whatever you call it, did you see the murder committed?"

"No."

"Then how did you come to that conclusion?"

"That was deduction. When I woke from the hypnotic state, I thought of the claw-marks on Professor Adams' neck, and at the same moment my eye caught a pair of specimen claws in the museum case, carefully arranged, neatly labelled. The label stated that they came from a full-grown animal of the same species as the giant sloth. In other words, that pair of specimen claws would make marks on the neck of the professor identical with the claw-marks of the live sloth. It would account for the tears in the professor's clothing, and for the marks on the floor around."

"But this is all deduction—theory!"

"No. I took out the claws from the museum case, and examined them with a pocket glass. I found that they had been carefully cleaned. Yet not so minutely that every trace of human epidermis had been wiped away."

Lethbridge rose and began to pace the room.

"Leave me to think this over," he said presently. "What you say has given me a great shock. Is there nothing more I can do for you?"

"Thank you, I have the material I want," answered Dr. Wycherley, taking up the notes he had previously made, and preparing to leave. "Don't trouble to come to the outer door. I know my way."

"Good night, then."

"Good night."

Dr. Wycherley closed the door of the sitting-room behind him and opened the outer oak. But he did not step out into the stairway. He closed the oak again with a firm bang of the spring-lock, and waited.

After the expiry of sixty seconds, the doctor opened the sitting-room door quickly and walked in.

"I came back for a favourite pencil I left . . ." were the words on his lips, but there was no need for verbal excuse.

Arthur Lethbridge was lying prone on the floor in a dead faint. By sheer will-power he had held himself together so long as the doctor was in the room, but when the latter had apparently passed beyond the outer oak, the overwrought heart had had its way.

* * * * * * *

"Why are you here again?" was the question from the young demonstrator when he awoke to consciousness to find himself on a couch with Dr. Wycherley holding a moistened handkerchief to his forehead.

"I came back to ask why you killed your friend."

"I . . . killed . . . the professor!" The protest came weakly.

"Yes. And the motive is beyond me. It was not anger; it was not jealousy; it was not revenge. Why did you do it?"

"I didn't!"

"Remember, the facts are known only to you and to myself. The police know nothing as yet of what I said to you to-night. Who shall tell them—you or I?"

"You're trying to torture a confession out of me!"

"You would not confess to what you had not done," replied the doctor firmly.

Lethbridge sat up suddenly. "Neither you nor I shall tell the police," he answered. "If nobody else knows, the death had far better rest at accident."

"Why?"

"Because it was done for her sake."

"Mrs. Adams?"

"Yes, for her sake alone. I had nothing to gain by it. You surely don't think me capable of killing a friend in order to marry his widow?"

"No, I don't think that. But what was exactly your motive?"

"With all your powers of intuition, you seem singularly dense."

"I am still a student of the human mind—only a student," answered the doctor quietly.

"You guessed the two halves of the story. You had only to place them together to make the complete picture." Lethbridge rose, a little unsteadily, and went to his favourite seat by the window-sill, leaning back amongst the cushions.

"Professor Adams," he continued, "was on the verge of insanity. I had known it for a long time past, but it was only recently that his condition of mind became a menace to others. He decided very hastily to marry, and Blanche—Mrs. Adams—a young girl knowing little of the world, agreed to marry him almost without an engagement. I implored the professor not to marry. I pointed out the dangers. I urged his duty to society in general. I urged the eugenic aspect of such a marriage. He refused to listen to any argument of mine. He married Blanche, and they went away for their honeymoon.

"When they returned, his outbursts of temper became more frequent and more violent. You, Doctor, will know well that a man in his condition might be at one and the same time a loving husband and a constant menace. I am not only thinking of the children of such a marriage; I am thinking also of the way in which a man with homicidal mania is liable to attack those nearest and dearest to him."

"Homicidal mania—you were sure of that?"

Lethbridge threw off his coat and turned up the sleeve of his left arm. "Feel here," he said to Dr. Wycherley.

"A badly-set fracture."

"I didn't take it to a doctor. I wanted to keep the affair quiet. I set the arm myself as best I could."

"The professor attacked you?"

"With an iron bar. Quite suddenly and unexpectedly, without the shadow of a cause. After that I had to watch him very warily when we were alone together."

"You could have had him examined by a doctor, and if necessary, put under restraint."

"Yes, and let Blanche be legally chained for life to a madman in an asylum! As the out-of-date laws of this country now stand, that is what would have happened. No divorce possible. A young girl chained to a madman until his death releases her. What a mockery of human liberty! . . . I thought over the matter in every aspect, and I could see only one way out for Blanche. Then I did—what I did. I made very careful arrangements to suggest an accident, and but for your guesses or intuitions or whatever they may be, an accident it would have remained. Now—!" Lethbridge shrugged his shoulders.

Dr. Wycherley remained silent, thinking deeply over the extraordinary motive laid bare in the young man's recital. He did not doubt its essential truth, for every word dovetailed in with what he already knew.

"Well?" asked Lethbridge at length. "What do you propose to do?"

Dr. Wycherley rose and went to the desk where he had copied the notes from the volume of Hartwell and Stevens.

"I came back for a favourite pencil I had left be-

hind. Ah, here it is. . . . As for the rest"—his hand was on the door-handle—"as for the rest, I am going to leave it between you and your conscience."

"Good night, then," said Lethbridge from his window-seat, tonelessly.

"Good night," answered the doctor.

CHAPTER XVI

A WANDERER RETURNED

IT was following on the strange case of Professor Creighton Adams, in early July, that Dr. Wycherley found himself at Henley Regatta. The life of the 'Varsity had made a distinct appeal to him through its pulsing youth and unshattered enthusiasms, and he wished to see more of it at the great annual river festival. He therefore accepted readily an invitation for Henley Week extended to him by Professor Devene, one of the Trinity dons, and that had led to a chance introduction to Major Fitzalan, who rented a river bungalow at Henley for the season.

The major, on hearing of Dr. Wycherley's reputation as a mind-reader, had asked for his help on a very delicate matter, and the doctor, much interested in the curious story that had been put before him, had consented to do what might lie in his power.

The two of them, with Mrs. Fitzalan, a very capable, carefully-beautiful woman of thirty, were seated on the Henley lawns, gay with pinks and blues of frocks and blazers, sunshades and college ribbons, joyously surgent with the spirit of youth, rippling with young life. In a corner of the lawns sat old Lord Dallas—a blind man drinking in the sounds of joyous youth, and in

them remembering his own youth when he too threw soul into the straining oar and drank deep of the cup of victory. There was a race in progress, and as the bands of undergraduates ran by the towpath shouting and cheering on their college crews, a flush came into the old man's face as if he felt his hands once again upon the oar.

By his side sat a tall, dark, heavily-framed man of forty-five—a man with a hard straight eye and a mouth that told of strength in reserve. A silent, guarded man who spoke little, and then in short, abrupt sentences. A reserved, secretive man. He had a habit of gripping the sides of his chair with both hands as though keeping tight grip of his secret thoughts.

After twenty years of wanderings he had come back to claim his place as the son and heir of Lord Dallas, now blind and feeble and with few years of life left to him. That was the *claim* of the stranger.

"It was over twenty years ago that Morton Langdale quarrelled with his father and flung out of the house," explained Major Fitzalan in amplification of the previous conversation wherein he had asked for Dr. Wycherley's help. "Nothing was heard of him directly; he never wrote to his relatives. Indirectly we heard that he was fighting with the United States army in the Philippines. Then he disappeared again out of our knowledge. That Philippines episode may be important if it comes to a lawsuit, because we might be able to hunt out someone who knew the real Morton Langdale there."

His wife shook her head in contradiction. "We

should stand a very poor chance in a lawsuit. That I'm quite sure of. If my uncle continues to acknowledge him as his son, it will be taken as overwhelming proof. . . . Isn't it a pathetic sight?" she went on indignantly. "There's my uncle, blind and helpless, and there's that mercenary scoundrel using his blindness and his helplessness to bolster up this horrible imposture! If he could only get his deserts!"

"He's clever—devilishly clever," put in the major.

"Yes, he'd squirm out of any tight corner. That's why we ask for your help, Doctor," proceeded Mrs. Fitzalan with strained anxiety in her face. "Mary Devene told us about the marvellous power you have of getting at the back of people's minds, and so——"

Dr. Wycherley interrupted with a gesture of deprecation. "Please don't exaggerate my powers," he said. "I am no wonder-worker—merely a student of the human mind. Still a student."

But Mrs. Fitzalan would allow no self-deprecation on the part of the doctor to stand in her way. She was a woman of strong will, as her husband had long since learnt and submitted to. She proceeded to detail what she had heard from Mary Devene, and concluded by bringing it round to the present case. "If you could manage that kind of thing, Doctor, surely you could find some way of getting at my uncle's mind and showing him what a horrible imposture is being practised? You see, anything *we* have urged has been discounted by our self-interest. That's the point that's driving me to desperation. When we say this man's an impostor—another 'Roger Tichborne'—the answer

comes at once, Major Fitzalan is next heir to the estate and therefore prejudiced. No one will believe that we can act from anything but selfish motives."

"To have our name pass into the hands of a man like that—to see Greeve Hall lorded over by a scoundrel from God knows where! That's what sticks in my throat!" In Major Fitzalan's voice was sincerity unmistakable; there could be no doubt how deeply he felt the wrong that was being done not only to himself but also to his family.

Yet Dr. Wycherley answered with the caution of the scientist: "All this rests on the supposition that we are dealing with an impostor. So far I have heard only your side of the case, and I cannot promise to act until I have fully assured myself——"

"I can give you a dozen proofs, fifty proofs!" interrupted Mrs. Fitzalan. "From the first moment I set eyes on him I felt my suspicions. And then the little points that tell a woman so much. His secretiveness; his constant air of being on guard. Oh, the man has been splendidly coached in his part, and he's devilishly clever, but if my uncle were not blind and a little feeble in mind, he would have seen through him weeks ago. But the crowning proof is this." She glanced around to make sure that there were no eavesdroppers, but indeed no one was taking any notice of them. Then she drew out from her satchel-bag a cheap, common sheet of letter-paper written on in an ill-formed, uneducated hand, and passed it to Dr. Wycherley.

The psychologist examined it very closely after he

had read the words, and asked: "How did this come into your hands?"

Major Fitzalan flushed perceptibly as he answered: "We—er—intercepted the letter. I know it sounds a deuced unsporting thing to do, but when you're dealing with a——"

His wife took up his hesitating words in her own decisive fashion: "One has to meet a scoundrel on his own grounds. I've not the slightest compunction in the matter. I felt that letter held the key to the situation, and I was amply justified in getting hold of it. You see what the letter amounts to, Doctor—a veiled threat to extort money from him. No name; no address. Now, no man can be blackmailed without good cause."

Dr. Wycherley did not answer this. His gaze was fixed on old Lord Dallas in the far corner of the lawns. Another race was in progress, and the wild shouting and cheering on the towpath told that it was a neck-and-neck struggle between Trinity Hall, Lord Dallas' own college, and Leander. In his excitement the old man had risen from his chair as though his sightless eyes could see over the heads of the crowd, and quite suddenly he fell back clutching at his chair. The excitement had caught at his heart.

Dr. Wycherley moved forward swiftly to his aid. Morton Langdale (or the man who had taken that name) had laid his father on the grass before the doctor had reached the scene, and was loosening his collar. In one glance he took in Dr. Wycherley and had him mentally classified.

"Thanks," said Langdale abruptly, before a word

had been spoken. "You're wanted, Doctor. Give orders, and I'll see them carried out."

* * * * * * *

Greeve Hall lies a few miles back from the river at Henley, deep bedded in the woods that clothe the hills on the Berkshire side. From the observatory tower—which Lord Dallas had used for his hobby of astronomy—you look out over thicket and park-land sweeping down in dark green stateliness to the lush meadows where the Thames winds in and out as a band of splendid silver. A house and land breathing of old traditions, high ideals, the shaping of centuries. They fitted well with the fine-strung motto of the Langdale family, "I hold no shame."

Lord Dallas had been taken back at once to Greeve Hall, and the mental healer had ordered him complete rest for several days at least. A fainting attack which would have been of trifling moment for a young man might have serious consequences for an old man of seventy. With the professional permission of the family doctor, the mental healer was remaining at Greeve Hall for a few days until his patient should be entirely restored. He found a willing collaborator in Miss Seton, a distant relation of the family who for many years past had stayed at Greeve Hall to keep the cares of his position away from the shoulders of Lord Dallas. She was devoted to him. A sweet, gentle woman, scarcely marked by the passage of forty years—one of those Englishwomen whose lives are given to good works, which in return give them perennial youth. An Eng-

lishwoman of the countryside, subtly suggestive of lavender and rosemary and sweet-william and the other old-world flowers that grow by the south wall in quiet leisure and very pleasant fragrance.

During his brief stay Dr. Wycherley was closely observing Morton Langdale. It roused his professional interest to a high pitch. The man had a mind encased as it were in steel. Though with most men and women the mental healer could read deep into their thoughts and emotions, in the case of this man he was strangely baffled. It was as though Langdale kept tight grip of his thoughts behind the barrier of his will.

An unusual case, and therefore of peculiar interest to Dr. Wycherley. He had the zest of the collector for the rare specimen. He could not rest content until he had it pinned out in his collection, properly classified and labelled. And on his part Langdale seemed to be studying the doctor guardedly.

In the smoking-room one evening there had been long silences between them while Langdale sat with his hands tight gripping the sides of his chair, and Dr. Wycherley rolled cigarette after cigarette in his wonderfully deft left-handed fashion.

Langdale had broken one of the long, heavy silences with the strange, disconnected remark:

"What is the supreme test of courage?"

Dr. Wycherley considered for some moments before replying. "It depends on the individual temperament. To a few, to sacrifice life. To more, to sacrifice love. To most, to sacrifice the choice of life—to take the living death with a smiling face and bear with it uncom-

plainingly to the end. Think of the men and women who suffer in silence, showing a brave cheerfulness to the world; think of the X-ray martyrs, of Father Damien . . . "

"Yes." There was abrupt agreement in the tone. But Langdale did not add to his monosyllable, and so the doctor continued after a pause:

"One rarely hears of the world's real heroes. They make no headlines for the newspapers. Their living death makes no more stir than a bubble in the stormy Atlantic. Outside their small circle no one knows of them; even within their circle few suspect the sacrifice that has been made."

"Then what good do they do?"

The leading point of these questions was not apparent. But Dr. Wycherley wished keenly to get behind the reserve of this silent, secretive man, and he was glad to keep the apparently purposeless conversation proceeding. He replied: "I am no pessimist. I do not believe theirs is waste effort. There is a mental aura that radiates out from a man that makes for good or evil in others. A silent, unseen urge. There is no name for it; no way of detecting or measuring or analysing it. Yet it is one of the great realities. . . . Do you agree with me?"

"Possibly," was the abrupt answer, and Langdale relapsed into silence again. Presently he fingered his watch, suppressed a yawn, and remarked: "I think I shall be getting off to bed. Please ring for anything you want. . . . Good-night."

When he had left, Dr. Wycherley rolled himself a

double-length cigarette, lit it and held it at arm's length, and proceeded to concentrate his gaze upon it. According to his custom when puzzled by a case of observation, he wished to throw himself into a light hypnoidal sleep so as to recover all of the impressions that Langdale's presence had radiated into his sub-conscious mind.

The cigarette burnt slowly through, and when the burning end scorched the doctor's finger-tips he awoke with a start. Then he quickly left the smoking-room and mounted up to the high tower where Lord Dallas carried out his astronomical hobby. The room was now unoccupied. Dr. Wycherley took up a small hand telescope and began methodically to sweep the surrounding woods and park-lands, dark with the night, from the crest of Gleydon Rise down to the lush meadows that border the silver Thames. In his systematic, scientific fashion he took strip after strip of the territory and searched every star-lit glade for the object he had in mind.

In his light hypnotic sleep there had come to the doctor a strong impression that Langdale was being menaced that evening. Doubtless it would be something in connection with the anonymous letter which Mrs. Fitzalan had shown him. And so, though Dr. Wycherley greatly disliked the idea of shadowing any man, he felt that here was a case where ordinary feelings must be put aside. The happiness of too many people was involved to allow over-fine scruples to stand in the way of his duty to others.

It was a long while before he found the object of his search—a man standing under the shadow of a

broad oak-tree, waiting on some appointment. Dr. Wycherley fixed his telescope on a support of cushions and sat down to keep watch. The man was a rough, stocky, strongly muscular figure—probably a sailor or a navvy of some kind. He moved about impatiently under the tree as though he were being kept waiting.

And presently the doctor saw the figure of Morton Langdale moving quietly and unhurriedly down the park-land, under the shadows of the trees and hedges, going to keep appointment. He was unhurried in his movements, as if he were designedly holding his man waiting, but yet he kept closely to the shadows as though secrecy were a vital factor.

When the two men came face to face under the shadow of the oak-tree there was very evident recrimination from the sailor. It was a strangely silent quarrel that Dr. Wycherley was witnessing through his telescope. No sound could come to him from that distance, and he bent every faculty of mind to the task of trying to read what they were saying from the gestures and attitudes.

Words ran high on the part of the sailorman, but Langdale was at first cool and collected. He was trying to beat down the other man by force of will. There was a tense strain of attitude that told of the tense grip of mind. And presently the strain of holding himself in against the jibes or threats passed the breaking-point, and he whipped forward on the sailor with clenched fists and blazing eyes. For a moment the man slunk back, and then there came from him some retort that caused Langdale to drop his fists and droop his shoulders in

defeat. He took out his pocket-book and began to count out bank-notes. Dr. Wycherley could see the sailorman eagerly clutching his booty and crinkling the notes one by one to satisfy himself of their genuineness.

Langdale stood moodily under the oak-tree long after the man had left with his plunder. His tall frame drooped—in his attitude was the bitter realisation of moral cowardice. Slowly he began to retrace his way up the park-lands, while Dr. Wycherley watched him concentratedly through his telescope.

"What have you seen, Doctor?" asked a low, gentle voice at his elbow, and he turned to find beside him Miss Dorothy Seton, with a lace shawl thrown around her head against the night air. In her voice there was pitiful anxiety. "What is happening to him?"

"To——?"

"To Morton—to Mr. Langdale. I want to know what it all means, even more than you do! Oh, tell me, what is threatening him, what does all this mystery mean?"

Dr. Wycherley looked back at her with understanding and deep sympathy. "I see. You believe in him."

A flush came into her face, and there was a note of pride in her voice as she answered: "I *know!*"

"You knew Mr. Langdale before he went away, twenty years ago? . . . Ah, I see that you knew him well. More than well. There was understanding between you?"

"He was . . . very dear to me." Her face was turned away into deep shadow. She paused, but the

sympathy that had lain in Dr. Wycherley's voice drove her to fuller confidence. "I thought at the time that he cared for me, too. It was just such a night as this when we sat together under the big cedar-tree in the garden at the Henley Week ball. How grave it looks, the old cedar-tree—how heavy with memories! The starlight touched softly on the old branches, as if it were smoothing away the wrinkles of age. The damask roses by the windows of the ballroom were languorous with scent. The orchestra was playing 'Queen of My Heart.' It was new then—more than twenty years ago. Perhaps to-day it would sound tawdry, but then . . . And there was a light in his eyes that . . . Oh, why am I telling you all this?"

"Because you have my very deep sympathy. Because I would help you in any way possible to me. . . . And you have been waiting for him these twenty years?"

"Yes." Her answer was barely audible. "So that when he came back I knew it was he. How could I be mistaken? And yet he came back cold and distant, and I don't understand. He is so changed—so reserved and secretive. There is some mystery about him, and I don't understand it. Tell me what it is! Are you his friend?"

It was difficult for Dr. Wycherley to answer this. "I am an observer," he said slowly, "a student of men and women. The mystery around Mr. Langdale has intrigued me. But rest assured of this, that so far as it lies within my power to serve you I will do so.

Now tell me this: what you have just confided to me, has it passed to anyone else?"

"To no one else. There is something about you, Doctor, that draws one's confidences. Something magnetic, compelling. You are practically a stranger to me, and yet I felt you would understand and sympathise. . . ."

"It is a gift I value very greatly. Yes, you were right to tell me this. It will help more than you can possibly guess. I see a way, a method of making sure!" The doctor's eye was lighting with the enthusiasm of the scientist. "A beautiful method! Of course the technique of psycho-analysis is not new, yet the application would be novel in the extreme. . . . But these details would scarcely interest you. You will excuse the scientific temperament, will you not? I was forgetting to answer your question. You asked what is happening to Mr. Langdale, and I am at liberty to tell you this: he is being blackmailed. As to the cause, I am now investigating."

"But he would never have done anything criminal! I know him too well. He is the soul of honour. The Langdales are a race with fine traditions and splendid ideals, and Morton is a true Langdale. You know our motto, 'I hold no shame.'"

"You said that the orchestra was playing 'Queen of My Heart' on that night of the ball, twenty years ago?"

"Yes, but why? How could that possibly help in unravelling the mystery?" she answered in open surprise.

Dr. Wycherley did not answer this directly. "Please mention to no one whatever that we have been talking about Mr. Langdale. This is vital," was all he said.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SUPREME TEST OF COURAGE

MAJOR FITZALAN'S river bungalow, "Lazyland," lay within easy distance of Greeve Hall. It was a pretty little toy house with its riot of clambering roses and wistaria and its dainty summer rooms panelled in white wood and carpeted with cool green matting. Amongst the Liberty furniture there was one chair in curious contrast to the rest—a stiff plush-covered armchair with the arm-rests in polished nickel like a dentist's chair.

Dr. Wycherley had had it brought from London for a special and important purpose. Out of sight, covered electric wires ran under the matting from the chair to partition wall in white wood and through into a small bedroom behind. And in this small room he had installed—of course with the Fitzalans' permission—an elaborate piece of scientific apparatus connected with the two electric wires that ran to the plush-covered armchair.

The most striking feature of the apparatus was a revolving "drum" wrapped round with soot-blackened paper. Against this rested a very light metal pointer connected electrically with the wires and a battery of Bunsen cells. To the physiologist such a piece of ap-

paratus is very familiar—he uses it in scores of experiments where blood pressure curves or nerve current curves have to be registered.

Major Fitzalan had regarded it with curiosity and a little soldierly contempt for whatever he did not thoroughly understand. Dr. Wycherley was explaining as he fitted up the connections and made his preliminary tests:

"To-night we should be able to get conclusive, incontrovertible evidence on Morton Langdale—or the man who claims his name. He has accepted your wife's invitation to dinner and the informal concert afterwards, and she will manœuvre him into that plush-covered armchair. When he places his two hands on the nickel arm-rests, according to his usual habit, that completes the electric circuit, and we then have a current passing through his body and connected with this metal pointer by relay."

"Surely he would feel the current?" suggested the major doubtfully.

"No, it is too weak. Sit in the chair and try for yourself."

The host did so, and admitted that there was nothing particular to be felt. "But what happens then?" he enquired.

"The concert goes through according to the programme I have arranged with your wife."

"And then?"

Dr. Wycherley finished with an adjustment of the soot-blackened cylinder. "A man can hide his feelings and emotions so that not one muscle quivers—so that

not the faintest sign appears in face or hands or body-movement—but there is one thing he cannot control. His nerve currents. Any strong emotion in the mind sets up nerve currents, internal electric currents. Your strongly controlled, intensely reserved man may show no faintest outward sign of his feelings, but nevertheless he will reveal himself infallibly through this instrument. There is no evading it; no deceiving it."

"It seems deuced ingenious," said the major.

Dr. Wycherley smiled quizzically. "Meaning that in your opinion it is extremely foolish and unpractical?"

The major fumbled with a conventional denial.

"Yet," proceeded the doctor, "it is a method of technique used to-day by the foremost psychologists of the world. On this smoke-blackened drum we shall read to-night the workings that will tell us of Langdale's inmost thoughts."

That evening, when the concert was in full swing, with the guests gaily chatting between the songs and the light music when Morton Langdale, still cold and reserved, sat in the plush-covered armchair and automatically laid his two hands on the metal rests; Dr. Wycherley excused himself and retired to his improvised laboratory behind the partition wall.

The current was in circuit, as his galvanometer showed; it was passing through Langdale's body via the two arms. The doctor set the drum slowly revolving by clockwork with the metal pointer lightly pressing against it and scratching a thin line through the smoky coating.

At the piano Mrs. Fitzalan, by pre-arrangement, had started a popular waltz-air from the musical comedy of the day. The line of the pointer quivered slightly, then ran on evenly. Presently came a war-song—one of the Kipling poems set to music—sung by Hubert Llewellyn, a prominent tenor of the day, who happened to be staying with the Fitzalans for a week-end. And with that there formed on the recording drum a ragged line that mutely testified to the emotions it was arousing behind the cold, passionless face of Morton Langdale.

And when the applause had subsided at the finish of the song, Mrs. Fitzalan laid her hands on the broad, mellow chords that form the introduction to the song from the opera of "Dorothy" that had swept over all England twenty years before with its message of "Why should we wait for to-morrow? You're queen of my heart to-night!"

As Dr. Wycherley watched eagerly the soot-blackened cylinder slowly revolving against the metal pointer, there came a sudden leap in the curve and a quivering ragged line that placed the inscrutable Morton Langdale beyond all doubt as the son of Lord Dallas and the afore-time lover of Dorothy Seton.

* * * * * * *

They were walking home together through the starlit parklands to Greeve Hall—Dr. Wycherley and Langdale.

Said the doctor suddenly: "I owe you a very sincere apology."

"For——?"

"For doubting your identity."

"Mrs. Fitzalan had her hopes, I know," answered Langdale evenly. "I have been very much afraid she would get at my father over the matter and worry him. He is old, and I want to keep anxiety away from him."

"Without your knowing it, you have to-night been put to the test."

For the first time Langdale showed open surprise. "How?"

"The details of the method are unimportant. The vital point is that you have *proved yourself*. And I have a message for you: *she* has been waiting for you these twenty years—very patiently and very steadfastly. Ever since that night at the ball . . . sitting out by the big cedar tree in the star-light . . . while the orchestra played to you 'Queen of My Heart.' . . ." The doctor paused and turned round, looking at his companion full in the eyes with his deep, searching gaze.

"My God!" Langdale gripped tight on his stick and was silent for a long while.

Then he burst out, as though the barriers of his self-repression had broken down and the waters of his soul must needs pour out through the shattered gates: "I come back a coward—a proved coward! I had my supreme test, and I failed! It happened in this way: I was in the war in the Philippines, fighting in the United States army. I carried out some risky bits of work, and at the time I thought that was courage. I didn't know the elementary meaning of the word. That kind of thing is child's play." He laughed bitterly at himself.

"Then after the war I fell in love with a very beautiful young Spanish girl—or rather, half Spanish, half Filipino. I was carried out of myself and I married her. My ardour cooled down; hers continued. I went away on a pearling expedition, and when I came back to her the most ghastly discovery possible met my eyes."

He paused in horror of his recollection.

"She had developed leprosy—it had just begun. It is rare out there, but it exists. They quarantined us on San Fêlipe island—she and myself, because I was her husband, and suspect. In six months' time the disease had gained strong hold of her, but I was untouched. Then came my supreme test. The doctors told me I was free of suspicion and could go. Manuela implored me to stay by her—implored me on her knees. But I couldn't bear with the sights of that terrible island, and the thought of staying by her while she slowly consumed away was more than I could stand." In bitter self-abasement he added: "I gave up—quitted—branded myself a coward."

Dr. Wycherley was deeply touched at this confession. He asked gently: "And that is why you are being blackmailed?"

"You know that? . . . No, the man's story is half truth, half lie, and that is where its devilishness comes in. His story is that I was not allowed to go, but that I *escaped* from San Fêlipe. It's a lie. But to think of having such a lie spread around amongst people eager to believe anything to a man's discredit! And especially to have such a lie reach my father's ears! The shock would kill him. So I gave in and paid hush-

money. While my father lives I shall go on paying hush-money. After that . . . " He paused significantly, and his hand tightened on his stick.

" Your wife? " questioned Dr. Wycherley.

" She is dead now. Dead these two years. For myself, I have been examined by doctors again and again, and they tell me there is not the remotest suspicion. . . . Now you will begin to realise that if I failed at the test, I have paid for it over and over again in remorse. As to Miss Seton, how could I go to her with this stain on my life, without telling her? "

" Then tell her," answered Dr. Wycherley firmly. " For twenty years she has been waiting. It is her right to know, and knowing, to have choice. For you it is a second test of courage, and if you rise to it you will efface your other failure. . . . See, she is up there in the tower. Her white lace shawl shows by the open window. She waits for you. Go to her."

Langdale gripped the doctor's hand in silent thanks.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MYSTERY OF CASTLE KREMENZ

THE season at Felsbrunnen was dying.

From the study of the local "bath doctor," Dr. Wycherley looked out over the marble drinking fountain and the half-deserted promenade, sorrowful with the leaves fluttering softly down from the yellowing lindens, yet beautiful in its sorrow.

"So you leave to-night?" said the local man. He had called Dr. Wycherley into consultation over the case of a very rich patient whom he was "nursing."

"Yes. All your patient needs is a spade or a washtub, and someone to drive her to work. A sheer case of gluttony and underwork."

"*Natürlich!* But one does not tell them so. Such patients, properly worked, are little gold-mines. She had a fancy to call in some specialist from a distance—the further away the better—and so I wrote to you in Italy. It will mean a fat cheque for you, and she will be quite happy." He laughed cynically.

But the mental healer turned away in disgust and looked out again over the promenade of the lindens, where the "Kurgäste" strolled slowly up and down. He had a deep pride in his profession, his life-work, and it hurt him keenly to have it treated in this sordid

fashion. "My time has been utterly wasted," he replied. "No cheque compensates me for that. From your letter to me at Lake Rovellasco I gathered that you had a case of very special psychological interest; otherwise I should never have made the long journey to here. Your patient is looking for a fortune-teller, not a scientist."

The little man with the Kaiser moustache bristled angrily. "If you want science without pay," he snapped, "you'd better take on a case like the von Hessele girl! That miserable-looking creature over there by the spring. That will give you all the psychological problem you want, and as for pay . . . well, the von Hesseles are as poor as church mice, and they're not wasting money over the fancied illnesses of a paid companion."

Dr. Wycherley replied evenly: "That English girl. Yes, I had been watching her for some time past. There is something very strange about her—something I have not yet settled in my mind. She is young, and yet she conveys to me a deep impression of Autumn. The leaves are falling from her tree of life. Why?"

"She is going the way of the others."

"The others?"

"The other paid companions of the Gräfin von Hessele. They don't seem to last long. Castle Kremenz appears to be an unhealthy place—a very unhealthy place—for young girls. But that's none of my business."

"Whose affair is it?"

The little man shrugged his shoulders. "No one's.

Yours, if you like. But let me tell you that it's not a poisoning mystery. They seem to fade away, and then they give or get notice. Nothing more. As for the reason, there's the problem for you. The castle is a few miles away from Felsbrunnen. It's a ruined shell of long-ago grandeur, and probably it's ghosts that make it unhealthy. The von Hesseles have always been known as a queer, eccentric family; I daresay they did a few lively murders in their day. You're a collector of ghosts, I hear, so you ought to find yourself in your element at Castle Kremenz." He laughed with an undercurrent of contemptuous malice.

The mental healer took up his hat and stick. Everything this man said and thought grated, jarred on him, and he longed to get away into the fresh, clean air outside. Abruptly he made some excuse, turned and went out on the promenade of the lindens.

The visitors left at this dying season were nearly all the genuine Kurgäste; the gay element that comes to Felsbrunnen as part of their yearly routine of pleasure had left the yellowing leaves and the tired sun for the glittering shop-windows and the flaunting lights of the cities. Amongst those who lingered by the baths and the fountain was this English girl, the companion to the Gräfin von Hessele, walking slowly up and down with a nickel cup of spring-water in her hand, sipping at it from time to time in a tired, nerveless way. A leaf fluttered down from a linden and softly brushed against her face. She started violently and let the cup slip from her nerveless fingers.

Dr. Wycherley, passing in his walk, came quickly

forward and restored the cup to her with a courtesy somewhat old-world in its elaboration.

She thanked him and said: "It was careless of me, but it's easily remedied. I will get a fresh cupful." And she made to leave.

"No," said Dr. Wycherley.

"I beg your pardon?"

"That leaf was a message."

"I don't understand you."

"A silent warning. It tapped you on the cheek, but it could do no more. See it lying there, pitifully dumb. Its work is over. Perhaps it was created on purpose to flutter down and warn you. Who knows?"

"What a strange thought! But what warning do you mean?"

"Your health."

"I know, the Graf has told me already. That's why I come here, whenever I can leave the Gräfin, in order to drink the waters."

"What has he told you? . . . Ah, you are wondering why I am asking such a question. I am a doctor, a psychologist—my name is Wycherley. . . . No, I have no motive beyond interest in my life-work and interest in your special case. . . . No, I am not eccentric, or at least I flatter myself I am not. Perhaps it is vanity on my part?"

The girl broke into a smile. "Why, you're reading my thoughts one after another. How strange to be able to do that!"

"I am gifted to a certain extent with the psychic sense, and I have trained it for my special purposes.

It has told me so much about you, that I am anxious to learn more. I should let you know, in strict fairness, that I have made enquiries about you. They tell me that you are the companion to the Gräfin von Hessele, that you live a few miles away from here at Castle Kremenz, and that your health has lately been getting worse. I read in you a deep surge of emotions under . . . "

She stiffened perceptibly, and Dr. Wycherley quickly broke off: " Ah, you feel that I am intrusive, that I am forcing myself upon you! Perhaps I should explain that I have been called across half Europe in consultation to a case here in Felsbrunnen. I arrived yesterday. My intention was to return to-night to my island on Lake Rovellasco. In that case we should probably never meet again, and the warning of your leaf would die stillborn. Yet if I could have been of service to you, I would have postponed my return. . . . As matters stand, it will perhaps be better for me to adhere to my plan."

He raised his hat in a manner somewhat old-world in its courtesy, and made to leave her.

She was clearly torn between conflicting emotions, and not until the doctor had moved away did decision come. Then she took a few quick steps and laid her hand on his arm impulsively. " Doctor, I was ungrateful! Please forgive me! Sometimes my thoughts drive me to do things I don't mean to do. Perhaps it's the melancholy of the castle. My nerves are not right. I imagine things. . . . "

" It is a strong motive that keeps you at Castle

Kremenz," said Dr. Wycherley as she hesitated and paused.

The girl shrank slightly as she answered in haste: "Yes, of course I have my living to get, and posts are not easy to find. My name is Margaret McKaye; my dear father was Colonel McKaye of the Black Watch. Perhaps you have heard his name in connection with the Afridi campaign? Unfortunately he had very little to leave us—hence my post as companion."

"Strangely enough, I was in India at the time, on the Border, investigating the so-called occult. I suggested to the authorities a certain novel method of settling the Afridi rising; if my advice had been taken, your father's life would not have been sacrificed."

"But surely you're not a service man!"

"Ah, my dear young lady, you have inherited the military idea that risings are only to be put down with lead and steel. That was precisely the view of the authorities, although every one of them knew that death in battle had not the slightest terror for an Afridi. Now, on the other hand . . . but these details of native habits of thoughts would scarcely interest you. I cannot say that I knew your father, though I dined once at the mess of the Black Watch and met him there. Still, that should serve sufficiently for conventional introduction."

"What did you think of my father when you met him?" asked Miss McKaye with an eager flush on her hitherto white cheeks.

"We scarcely exchanged a dozen words. Naturally I could see at a glance that he was one of those

fine, straight, fearless men who will carry out any impossible order without a second's hesitation. A 'Charge of the Light Brigade' man. The type of man who saves England in spite of muddle at the top."

"Yes, that was my father," she meditated.

"Suppose we sit down and discuss your case? I see a quiet seat over there below the terrace of the baths."

"Shall I fill my cup first?" Her tone now was that of patient to doctor. "Of course you believe in the waters?" she added.

"The waters are good for those who believe in them," continued the doctor, with his gentle irony. "To give impressiveness, the bath authorities publish a chemical analysis to eight significant figures. In point of fact, with the method of analysis employed, the limits of error in the most skilled hands are within six significant figures. That is typical of the insincerity of these cure resorts."

Margaret put down her empty cup on the seat, a little reluctantly. The blood had left her face, and it was again white and pinched. Under her eyes were tired hollows, and her eyelids drooped wearily.

Dr. Wycherley was observing her intently, not only with his eyes but also with his inner psychic sense, so sensitive to the vibrations of the minds of others. As if in continuation of his previous remarks, he took up the thread of conversation: "That will indicate to you my own opinion as to the value of the waters. I note that it is opposed to his."

The girl started violently. Her nerves were clearly

ill-controlled. "But . . . but . . .," she stammered, "what do you mean? Whom do you mean? I don't understand you!"

"The Graf von Hessele."

"When did you meet him?"

"I have never met him. I never even knew that he existed until you mentioned him a little while ago. . . . No, you are misjudging me. I have no wish to probe into your private thoughts out of mere curiosity. Only, if I am to act as your medical adviser, I must ask for complete confidence. . . . No, I have no personal motive beyond the pursuit of my life-study, medical psychology."

With her quick changes of mood, Margaret turned to him impulsively: "Indeed I ought to thank you deeply for the interest you are taking in me. I have so few friends that I am very very grateful, believe me. I can feel that you are doing this for me out of pure kindness. Yes, I can trust you! . . . And oh, the relief it would be to have someone to confide in! The melancholy of the castle! Ruin and decay everywhere. The Gräfin sitting motionless in her chair day after day and week after week. Always dressed in white—dead white. Her son, the Graf, always so busy in his laboratory, working at his experiments. No one else to talk to—no visitors; the housekeeper silent and sullen. In the daytime so quiet and still, and then at night! . . ." She broke off abruptly in her torrent of words, and for some moments there was silence between them.

From a yellowing linden another leaf fluttered softly down and settled in the girl's lap.

Dr. Wycherley pointed to it. "Its message," he said, "is to tell me all. Only in that way can I be of real help to you."

Her answer came in a voice lowered almost to a whisper, as though there were watchers to overhear them—invisible watchers from another world:—

"I wonder if you have ever felt when you have entered a strange house that there is some peculiar atmosphere about it—something indefinable that seems to cling to the place and gradually glide into your mind? It is a feeling I can scarcely put into words, Doctor, but it is a very real feeling."

The mental healer nodded sympathetically.

"Well, it was like that when I first entered the service of the Gräfin at Castle Kremenz. As I passed in by the drawbridge, under the old ruined gate, and into the great half-empty rooms of the castle, something seemed to close in around me and to press itself over my mind—first like a thin, gossamer cobweb, then like a very fine veil, then gradually thicker and thicker until at times I feel it like a blanket weight upon me." Her eyelids drooped as though there were some real physical weight upon them. "And when the blanket moves a tremour goes through me. It is as though someone were trying to pull at my mind, trying to get the fingers upon it; but feebly, just as a tiny baby would pluck at one. Tug . . . tug . . . tug."

"The conditions of your post are easy?"

"I oughtn't to complain. The Gräfin is a confirmed

invalid—paralysed in the lower half of the body—and chiefly I am required to read to her in German for hours on end. I go on reading, and she never makes a comment. Sometimes I wonder if she is listening or merely day-dreaming. But my other duties are light, and since posts as companion are difficult to get, I suppose I ought to be thankful to have mine."

"Her son?"

"Graf Otto is a man of about thirty-five. His hobby is chemical research, and he has a laboratory fitted up in the tower. At least, I understand it is chemical research, for I have never been inside his rooms. He allows no one whatever to enter. He is very reserved, but he is very clever, I know, and he is particularly kind to me. He is always enquiring after my health and having special dishes prepared to build up my strength. He insists, too, on my going to Felsbrunnen to drink the waters whenever his mother can spare me. The Graf is a man I . . . I very much esteem."

Dr. Wycherley made no direct comment. He had already sensed the motive that kept Margaret McKaye chained to her post at Castle Kremenz. But he asked this: "He has never married?"

"No, not to my knowledge." A flush came into her face as she said this, and her eyes were fixed on the pebbles she was digging into with the point of her sunshade.

"One further question: how did you come into the service of the Gräfin?"

"Through the International Agency in London. I knew German well—I was educated in Hanover—and

that was my great recommendation. That and the fact that I looked strong and healthy before I came to live here. Of course I know that appearances are deceptive and that people who look strong are not always so. I expect the Graf has been very disappointed in me, though he would never make a complaint in that direction. Before he engaged me in London, at the agency, he required me to go through a medical examination with a Harley Street man."

"The Graf engaged you?"

"Yes, naturally. The Gräfin is a complete invalid, and she does not travel about. I saw her first only when I entered Castle Kremenz, and she looked me over with her quick beady eyes in an instant and said: 'Good. She will serve.' Then she relapsed into her strange day-dreaming again."

"Now to take up a former point: at night-time . . . ?"

Margaret shivered involuntarily as the doctor brought back her thoughts to the point at which she had suddenly broken off some minutes before. She answered: "In the day-time it is so silent and lonely, and then in the night there come the strange whisperings and creakings, and worse, the terrors that move on padded feet and make not the slightest sound! You can feel them approaching you without making the slightest sound, creeping stealthily up to the bed, nearer . . . nearer . . . nearer! Your heart stands still, as you wait for them to touch you!! Oh, you will think I am talking nonsense, I know. Just the foolish fancies of an overstrung girl."

"On the contrary, I never consider that patients are talking nonsense when they open their hearts to me. Thoughts and fancies are very real things—far bigger realities than people usually allow. What a man or woman thinks is far more important in life than what is said or done. Thoughts are a man's wealth or illth. . . . But haven't you tried special means to give you sound sleep?"

"Indeed, yes! The Graf has been particularly kind to me in that way. He has given me a special prescription to ensure sleep—there's a new discovery of his own in it, I believe. It's wonderful stuff to make one sleep all through the night, though in the morning it sometimes leaves one with a tired feeling. But if it hadn't been for that sleeping mixture, I don't think I could have endured staying on at the castle. . . . Now, Doctor, your eyes have been piercing into me—what do you read, what have you to say to me?"

"First, put your hand in mine." Dr. Wycherley took her hand in his own cool, firm grasp, and held it for many moments, while with closed eyes he concentrated intently on the feelings it brought before his mind—queer rapid flashes of sensation that he had long trained himself to analyse and interpret.

Then he released her hand and said: "This evening I come to the castle to see you in the capacity of an old friend of your father's. We will meet apparently for the first time for many years. You will introduce me to the Gräfin and her son and have me invited to stay to dinner——"

"But you forget my position," interrupted Mar-

garet. "I am only the companion to the Gräfin, and——"

"Conventions are walls of pasteboard—only solid when seen from a distance. If necessary I will invite myself to dinner. Now remember, you have a part to play."

"But a deception of that kind would mean that I was distrusting Graf Otto and his mother! That would scarcely be right after all his—after all their kindnesses to me."

Dr. Wycherley bent his grave dark eyes upon hers. "You assume," he said, "that the Gräfin and her son and the servants are the only inhabitants of Castle Kremenz."

The girl chilled with sudden horror. "Why, what do you mean? What a strange thought!"

The doctor did not reply to this. He was scribbling rapidly on a scrap of paper with his left hand, making quick rough sketches that were the embodiments of the fragmentary flashes he had sensed with his inner vision.

CHAPTER XIX

INSIDE THE CASTLE

THE castle lay back amongst the mountains from Felsbrunnen, some four miles by the forest path but nearly eight by road. For the purpose of his plan Dr. Wycherley decided not to hire a carriage or motor, but to walk there. In that way it would be difficult for the Gräfin to refuse hospitality to a stranger arriving late in the afternoon, just before dinner-time. The sky looked uncertain, too, and that made another element in his favour.

For possible eventualities he had brought an electric torch and stowed it away in an inner pocket. If circumstances forced him to return to Felsbrunnen through the black night over a rough forest path, it would prove decidedly useful. Or there might be other uses for it even more important.

As the doctor tramped through the forest of sombre pines, up the mountain-side behind Felsbrunnen, his thoughts were deeply concentrated on the case of Margaret McKaye. Here was a matter fifty times more interesting and more important than the case of gluttony and underwork to which he had been called into consultation.

It still remained a riddle to the mental healer, in

spite of what he had unravelled. What was it that was sapping the strength of the young girl—something material in the realm of the physical, or something beyond? The flashes of ghoulish semi-human features that had come to him as he held her hand and put himself *en rapport* with her inner thoughts—what did these refer to?

It was a riddle only to be solved in the fashion of the scientist, by experiment. And where an experiment was concerned, Dr. Wycherley grudged neither time nor thought nor money. The science of mind had for him the passionate interest that money-making has for the financier, cricket or golf for the keen sportsman, collecting for the connoisseur. And where the claims of science and humanity ran concurrently, as in this case of a friendless girl alone in a foreign land, he was trebly interested.

He was now passing down into a cliff-flanked valley on the other side of the mountain from Felsbrunnen. It was late afternoon, sunless, grey as to sky, a mournful spiritless grey. The pines had given place to beeches, reddening with autumn tints, the leaves drooping sorrowfully and now and again fluttering silently down to the undergrowth of tangled briar and wild raspberry. The stillness of the forest was the mournful stillness of the summer that is passing away. A stillness that creeps into the soul of man or woman. A grey silent dirge of the dying year.

The Castle of Kremenz comes suddenly into view as one rounds a corner of the cliff-flanked valley. It is perched high above, but it is almost hidden amongst the

tall trees when seen from below. Since the old days when it was the stronghold of a robber baron, standing flauntingly alone, the forest has crept round it in a silent advance, and the weeds and the briars now clutch at the ruined outer walls and creep over into the court-yards.

But the main portion of the castle stands firm against the decay around, and the tower-keep makes a landmark for the valley.

There was a bell to pull at the drawbridge gate that jangled harshly through the empty, weed-grown court-yards. It was answered by a queer little shrivelled old manservant who looked very dubiously at a visitor appearing on foot at that hour of the day. Dr. Wycherley asked for the Graf von Hessele, and after a wait of some ten minutes or more the Graf came to see him in the great bare reception-room.

The mental healer had long since learnt to rely on the general trend of first impressions—those heterogeneous sensations that come to one in a rush of feeling before the intellect has time to separate and analyse. In this case the rush of first impressions brought a feeling of deep distrust to Dr. Wycherley; yet on closer analysis there seemed to be little in the way of logical reason for it. The Graf von Hessele was a man of thirty-five, though his studies had bent his shoulders and given him the air of settled middle-age. His features were fine-cut with aristocratic lineage; his voice was coldly courteous; even in his rough laboratory clothes he looked unmistakably a man of breeding and culture. And there was a certain magnetism of outward person-

ality, difficult to analyse in words, which made understandable Margaret McKaye's silent passion—a passion unreciprocated.

In his hand he held Dr. Wycherley's card, towards which he glanced enquiringly.

"I am passing through Felsbrunnen," explained the doctor. "To-night I leave for Italy. By the merest chance I heard that you have in the castle, as companion to the Gräfin, the daughter of a very old friend of mine, Colonel McKaye. This is my reason for what would otherwise be an unwarrantable intrusion."

"I will give orders to have your coachman or chauffeur looked after while you are seeing Miss McKaye," answered the Graf coldly, after a very slight hesitation. He had a mannerism of pulling at his closely-cropped beard which somehow conveyed an unpleasant impression, though there was no logical reason for it.

"I have neither. As an old man with strong prejudice, I preferred to walk rather than engage a motor-car. But the way has proved longer and more tiring than I expected." The doctor paused significantly.

The Graf affected not to take the meaning of this significant pause, so Dr. Wycherley asked boldly, yet with a courtesy of manner that would have made refusal boorish in the extreme, for what he wanted: "Perhaps I might further intrude on your hospitality? The way has been tiring, and it will be long after dinner-time before I can reach Felsbrunnen. As an old man, my bodily needs are simple."

* * * * * * *

Dinner in the great half-empty dining-room—panelled in age-black oak and hung with the portraits of the dead and gone von Hesseles, looking down at the diners in the pride of a vanished grandeur—was a meal of deadly silences.

The Gräfin, a woman of fifty-five or so, with aquiline nose and piercing eyes, sat in grim silence in her invalid chair drawn up to the table, robed in dead white. Only at rare intervals did she make a comment, and then its sharpness cut into the air like a whip. Her son conversed with a cold courtesy, barely hiding the fact that he heartily wished the meal over and the doctor on his way back to Felsbrunnen.

Every now and again he pulled at his closely-cropped beard in a way that told of his masked impatience.

But the deadly silences did not displease the doctor. On the contrary, they were helpful to him in his disentangling of the riddle of Castle Kremenz, for while speech is mostly a concealment of thought, silence speaks nakedly to the inner hearing of the sensitive. And by the end of the meal he had made up his mind to his plan of action.

Before leaving, he took a short walk with Margaret round the ruined courtyards in the darkening, star-clouded night.

"I want you to point me out your bedroom," said the doctor.

"That window up above where I have put the box of ferns on the sill."

Dr. Wycherley measured carefully with his eye the

distance from the sill to an iron staple bedded in the stone wall below. "It will need at least ten yards," he mused.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Rope. Have you ten yards of rope for the cording of your boxes?"

"Yes, but . . . but . . . ," she stammered, "what do you mean by that? How do you want to use my rope?"

For reply Dr. Wycherley took out his pocket-book and a pencil, and then began to make, left-handedly, a rapid sketch on its pages. Finally he tore the page out and handed it to Margaret, flashing his electric torch so that she might see clearly what he had drawn on it.

"My father!" she cried. "My dear father. Oh, may I keep this sketch?"

"With pleasure," replied the doctor. "My point is here: your father was one of those fine, fearless soldiers who will carry out any impossible order without an instant's hesitation. From you, his daughter, I ask the same spirit. Have you the courage?"

By the light of the torch Dr. Wycherley could see the flush of understanding and sympathy in her face. He clicked out the light and continued: "I am going to give you orders which are equally 'impossible' in the social sense. To-night I want a rope-ladder hung out from your bedroom window so that I can climb up into your room from this courtyard. I am no longer a young man; a simple rope would be insufficient. I need a rope-ladder. Here is the way in which I want

you to make one." He plucked a couple of long grass stems from the weeds in the courtyard and proceeded to show her his meaning. "In that way I shall be able to get to your bedroom later on and watch over you through the night. . . . Yes, I know all this is socially 'impossible,' but social conventions are only of paste-board importance. Mrs. Grundy is an excellent paste-board person in her proper place. Let us keep her there. . . . To-night you will tell them that your nerves are feeling out of order and that you would like a strong sleeping-draught. You will take that sleeping-draught, lock your bedroom door from the inside, hang out from your window a thin string attached to the rope-ladder, so that I can pull out the rope by its aid, and go off to sleep in perfect confidence. Meanwhile I will take my leave of the Gräfin and her son, and spend the hours of waiting on the path back to Felsbrunnen."

"But, Doctor, it will rain. You might get your death of cold waiting in the forest. I couldn't let you risk that for me."

"There is a disused woodman's hut I noticed on my way here. That will shelter me. Now I want your promise that you will carry out your orders exactly as your father would have carried out his."

CHAPTER XX

THE SECRET OF THE LABORATORY

IT was raining with a thin mournful drizzle when a couple of hours later Dr. Wycherley made his way over the broken outer wall where the briars and weeds clambered, and stood in the courtyard of the castle below Margaret's window. He reflected that the rain would help to veil any slight accidental noise he might make, though indeed there was no reason why anyone should be listening.

The string was there, and by its aid he pulled out the rope ladder—a rough, amateurish production, but sufficient for its purpose if well secured inside. That point must be risked.

The ladder held, and soon he was inside the room and taking off his sodden cloak. Margaret lay on her bed, as the electric torch showed him, sleeping with the heavy breathing of the drug-taker. As a matter of experiment the doctor shook her by the shoulders with increasing force, but she only turned over drowsily without waking up. It was evident that the sleeping-draught produced a deep stupor—almost an anæsthesia.

Then he turned to examine the room. Like most of the rooms in Castle Kremenz, it was walled with stone covered over with cement. To relieve the depression

Margaret had had some of her own pictures sent over from England to hang on the walls. The door was locked from the inside. The floor was of stone flags, over which rugs had been spread. A strange detail: the legs of the bed were chained to the stone flooring. Chests and wardrobes of black oak stood grimly around with an air of guarding secrets of the forgotten past.

The drizzle of the rain outside made a mournful background of sound.

And for long hours Dr. Wycherley waited in his chair, watching for he knew not what. Into his sensitive mind came impressions which tallied broadly with those that Margaret had described to him, and he knew that there were realities behind them. Once, as he closed his eyes in a light doze, there flashed before his inner vision a procession of grey-robed girls, drooping, listless, mournful, with Autumn in their eyes—a procession which vanished in a flash as he set his mind to study it.

Now he knew one of the reasons for Margaret's intense depression in that sombre environment—a depression that went beyond mere imaginings. The room was peopled not with ghosts, but with *ghosts of thoughts*, with the lingering melancholy of the companions to the Gräfin who had lived in that room before Margaret's time and had faded away as she was fading away. They had gone, but their concentration of thoughts, running all on the same lines, had left behind them a psychic atmosphere of grey melancholy.

Yet that was not all.

There must have been a reason, a tangible reason, for their melancholy and their drooping of life.

If Autumn had come to them young, as it was coming to Margaret, what was the basic cause? What was the meaning of that ghoulish, half-human figure that had flashed before his inner vision while he was holding Margaret's hand?

For long hours Dr. Wycherley waited in tireless patience for what might solve the mystery.

It was going on towards midnight before action came. At first it was a slight noise of creaking that caught his sensitive ear and made him alert and tense on the instant. Then the creaking grew louder, and with a sudden shock the doctor realised as he looked over at the bed that this was sinking slowly to floor-level. He crept nearer to it on hands and knees. It was sinking to floor-level because the stone flags beneath it, to which it was clamped, had sunk below the level of the rest. Machinery was lowering it to a room or wall-chamber underneath. With a chill of horror there came to the doctor a picture of what this must have implied in the olden times when might alone was right, and the laws of hospitality to the stranger within the gates meant little. In the olden times the von Hesseles or their predecessors had been free lance robber barons: perhaps here lay one of the secrets of their past wealth.

But to-day such an explanation was out of the question. Why then was the bed of the young girl being lowered?

It had stopped now, and Dr. Wycherley crept silently to the side of the pit in the flooring from which

a dim lantern light struck upwards. With the back of a metal pocket drug-case to act as mirror, he lay flat on the flags and looked by reflection down in the hole.

Down below, by the side of the sleeping girl, still breathing heavily, was Graf Otto, fixing behind her shoulders what seemed to be a hypodermic syringe connected by tubing to a pump-like apparatus. But it was no syringe. Exactly the opposite. In a flash there came to Dr. Wycherley the realisation of what the Graf was doing. His apparatus was to suck blood out of the sleeping girl! Already he was starting to work the small hand-pump connected with the suction needle fixed behind her shoulders.

Dr. Wycherley wasted no time in seeking further explanation. Though an old man, he was at the edge of the pit in an instant and had leapt down, straight on to the Graf so as to break his own fall.

There was a snap of a bone and a hoarse cry of terror and pain as the doctor came down full weight on Graf Otto, bent low over his ghoulish work and unaware of the watcher above. Then in a brief struggle the lantern smashed out, the Graf wrenched himself free, and sounds told that he was groping his way out of the pit by some secret passage. Flashing his electric torch, Dr. Wycherley rapidly made sure that Margaret had not been injured in the struggle. She was still stupefied with the sleeping-draught, but unhurt; the doctor left her to follow the Graf.

The pursuit led through a narrow passage at the end of the pit, up a long flight of steps that ran undoubtedly in the thickness of a wall, again along an-

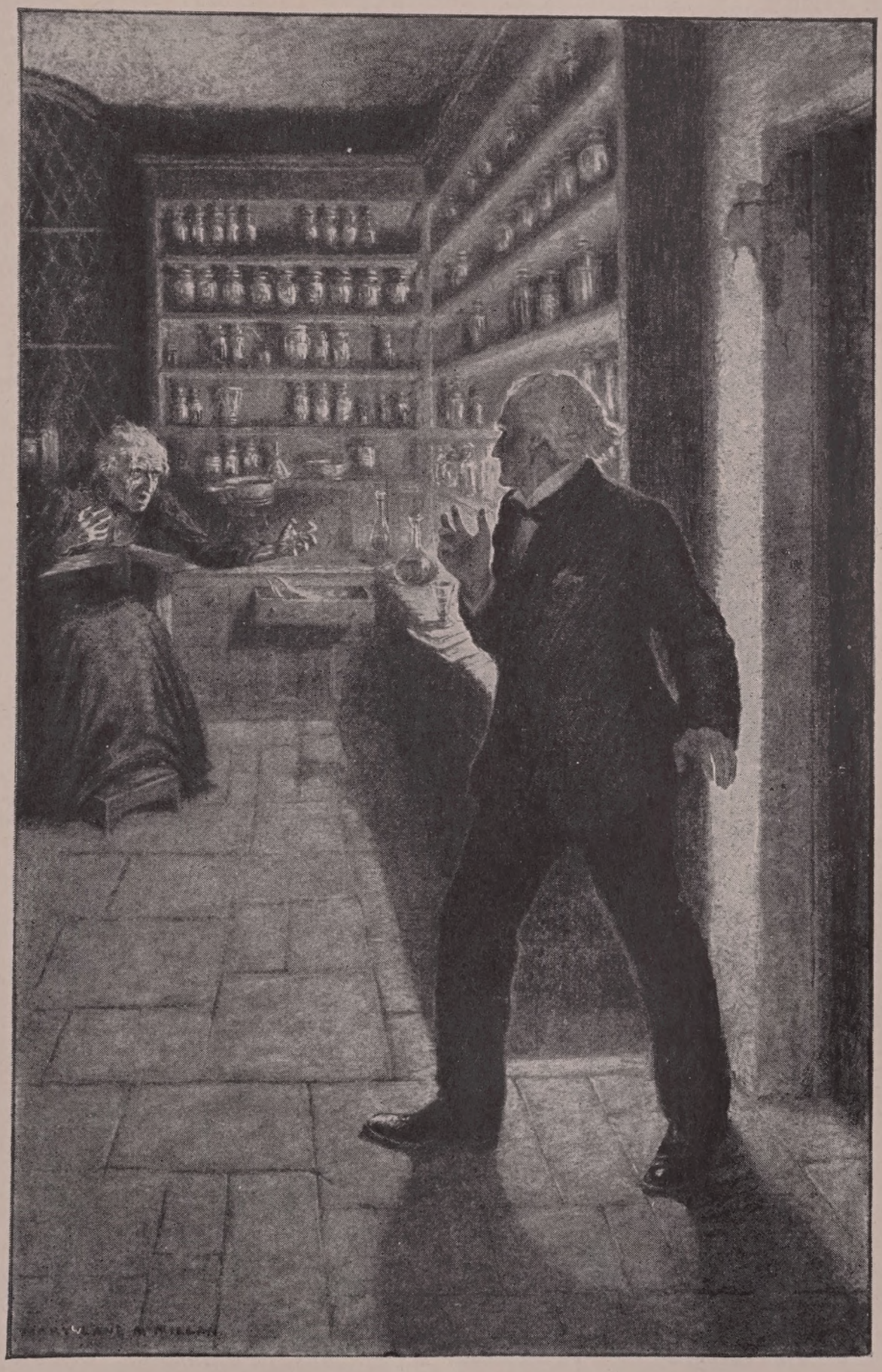
other secret passage, and then suddenly out into a lighted room where a profusion of chemical apparatus told at once that here was Graf Otto's private study. But it was not the apparatus of the research student that took Dr. Wycherley's attention, nor the Graf himself lying on a couch where he had thrown himself fainting from the pain of his broken arm.

It was an old woman sitting in a barred chair in a corner of the room—a chair that held her back from movement. But "old" is an adjective totally inadequate to describe her. Her age must have been far beyond the hundred; in her face were furrows graven as in the image of an Eastern idol. And when she caught sight of the doctor she cried, in a toothless mumble that rose screechingly like the voice of a parrot: "Give me blood. Give me blood! Give me blood! !"

Then her voice went down to a mumble, and again up to the shrill parrot screech, while she clawed to loosen herself from the barred chair with hands like a vulture's, horrible in their fleshlessness.

For a moment Dr. Wycherley recoiled from this terrible, ghoul-like creature. But only for a moment, and then he went quickly to the couch where the Graf lay in a faint, and loosened his collar and put his head low to bring him round to consciousness. In a few minutes he had recovered, to find the doctor strapping his broken arm against a wooden retort-clamp, as an improvised splint.

"Who are you?" he asked feebly. And then, with his voice gaining strength as full consciousness returned to him: "Of course—I see now. That *verfluchte* doc-



"'Give me blood. Give me blood! Give me blood!!'"

tor. And what the devil are you doing in my house? How did you get here? What right have you to——?"

Dr. Wycherley interrupted him without ceremony: "We will leave those questions. First answer mine. Why were you extracting blood from Miss McKaye?

"Come, answer me!" he went on imperiously as the Graf set his teeth in silence. "It was to inject into this . . . this terrible creature, was it not? Why?"

"She was mad for it," answered the Graf sullenly, plucking at his close-cropped beard with his usual unconsciously nervous gesture. "You don't understand the matter; it was the only thing to be done."

"Again, why?"

"It is like the drug habit. When I began years ago, it was only a scientific experiment. You understand me—a scientific experiment. To introduce a fresh strain of phagocytes into the circulation channels, and so prolong her life. But her system began to adjust itself to the injections, and then one had to continue with them. I tell you there was nothing else to be done; she began to scream for the injections. I have to keep her in the sound-padded room above—at the top of the tower."

"Who is she?"

"My great-grand-mother."

"Your great-grand-mother!"

Again there came that toothless mumble from the shrivelled figure in the barred chair, rising to the shrill parrot screech.

The Graf started to rise from the couch, saying:

"It is four days since the last injection; if she does not get it to-night——"

But Dr. Wycherley thrust him back firmly on to the couch. "You will lie there quietly. In a few moments I will summon someone to attend to you. First I want to know this: how long has this devilish practice been going on in regard to Miss McKaye? Come, I insist on an answer!"

"Since she came," was the reluctant reply.

"How often?"

"It used to be a week. Now it has to be more often. One is forced to it."

"Every few days?"

"Yes." This very reluctantly.

"And you have been draining a young girl of life to keep the spark burning in this old woman? You have been fanning her secret love for you in order to keep her chained here at Castle Kremenz; in order to provide life serum for this horrible . . . creature? No, it's more than that. To provide *you* with material for your experiments, just as you are using this great-grand-mother of yours as material. Because you yourself hope to live later on by the life serum of others. If you seek an elixir vitæ, it is for *yourself!* Answer me, am I right or wrong?"

But Graf Otto had turned his head away—his face was ashen-grey.

Dr. Wycherley rose with a shiver of loathing and made for the secret passage that led back to the pit where Margaret McKaye lay stupefied on the bed. And as he went, there followed on the sound of his footsteps

the toothless mumble of the old woman cut into by curt orders from the Graf.

He heard, too, through the arrow slit, the sound of servants clattering over the courtyard to the base of the tower.

* * * * * * *

It took months of skilled care and attention before Margaret McKaye was brought back again to her former health of body and mind. Dr. Wycherley had taken her to his island on the still waters of Lake Rovellasco, and in that garden of spices she came gradually to forget the shock of learning the true story of the mystery of the Castle, and to thrust out of mind the secret passion for the Graf that had kept her chained at Kremenz against the cry of every other instinct of her nature.

CHAPTER XXI

THE VOICE FROM THE OTHER WORLD

VENICE had shaken herself free from the blanket-heats of sweltering summer, and had plunged relievedly into the clean cool breezes of October as into a marble swimming-pool of crystal, cleansing waters. Venice wakes to new life in the fall of the year, claiming it as her spring. Then her lovers seek her once again to offer homage. "Non cosi nol mondo; nulla città più bella."

Dr. Wycherley, so ultra-modern in many respects and so old-fashioned in others, kept a tiny corner of his heart for the old-world romanticism of Venice, even though it were being snowed over these days by hordes of hustling tourists, by sea-bathing week-enders, by cinemas, penny steamboats on the Grand Canal, and projected subway tubes. Once a year he travelled to Venice from his home on Lake Rovellasco to breathe in its fragrance of poetry in stone and marble.

It was one October that he met at Venice an old acquaintance in the person of Mrs. Trevor Fordyce, the mother of Norman Fordyce the writer and poet. Dr. Wycherley had known her when the boy was first adventuring on the broad seas of literature; now he was famous over two continents.

Mrs. Fordyce had greatly changed. It was not only that time had frosted her hair and drawn ineffaceable lines on forehead and cheek; the change went far deeper than that—into the very roots of her being.

They reclined in a gondola together, and the red-sashed gondolier drove them with slow, even, powerful strokes over the rippling lagoon towards the Lido. The afternoon sun mingled its warmth with the freshness of the Adriatic breeze to ideal perfection.

"Seven years ago since we first met, here in Venice, my dear friend," she was saying, and there was a half-sigh in her voice. "That was the happiest time of my life. Why won't you scientists invent some elixir which will keep our life at its zenith-point?"

"And who is to say when the zenith-point is reached?"

"We women know."

"Tell me your secret."

"Indefinable. We *know*—what more can I say?"

"Science will not rest content with such an answer."

"Seven years ago my son was struggling for recognition. I was fighting for him, with him, shoulder to shoulder, we two against the world. That was the zenith of happiness. . . . Now he is famous." Her voice sighed like the wind in the leaves of autumnal elms.

"He married."

"When success came, he married. She was all that I could have hoped for in my son's wife. Position; beauty; a sweet nature."

"And yet you hated her?"

"She had taken away my only son."

"I am answered," said the doctor gently.

After a pause Mrs. Fordyce continued: "She died a year ago."

"Then surely he came back to you."

"No!" The word was flung out with the fire of long-repressed emotion. "No; *she keeps* him *still!*"

The doctor remained silent, with the silence of deep sympathy.

"How you draw out one's inmost confidences!" pursued Mrs. Fordyce. "I find myself telling you things I have told to no one else."

"And why not? Perhaps it may be in my power to advise. . . . Is there a child to link them together?"

"No child. I will tell you all. She keeps him to her by her voice—from the other world. She holds him fast to her by a whispered word. 'Dearheart,' she calls him still."

"You mean literally a voice from the other world?"

"Yes, literally. He hears her calling him. Not in dreams, but when awake. He can think of nothing else but her. He is always hoping to establish complete communication with her. His work, his mother, his friends—nothing matters to him now but that one fixed hope."

Dr. Wycherley looked at her keenly.

"At séances?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You believe in spiritualistic séances, after all the exposures of trickery and fraud that have been made?"

"What does it matter what *I* believe? Norman—he believes in them utterly. Nothing can shake his

faith since he has heard his dead wife calling. 'Dearheart,' she whispers. A few nights ago she spoke to him at greater length than ever before; she recalled some little point about their honeymoon that could have only been known to themselves. No other living soul could possibly have known of it. It puts trickery out of the question, you see. And yet——"

"And yet you suspect the medium."

"I do, but I have no grounds to go on. She is not a professional medium. She is helping him to establish communication practically without fee. We have come to Venice because she is here."

"Her name?"

"Signora Franchini."

The name conveyed nothing to Dr. Wycherley. It was certainly not that of any well-known professional medium.

"Could I see her?" he asked.

"It might possibly be arranged. But she does not welcome any casual stranger. She might object—she might say that your aura interfered."

Dr. Wycherley nodded. "Very probable."

"Then what do you advise?"

"Your son must make an introduction for me."

* * * * * * *

Norman Fordyce had the eyes of a dreamer. They held great depths of mystic, fanciful thought. They were gravely courteous, and yet they looked through and beyond one in a way that made lesser men suddenly realise their smallness. His long hair, prematurely

touched with grey, fell across his forehead in a broad, careless sweep. He was tall, but a slight stoop, not unpleasant, discounted his height.

All his writings were tinged with a symbolic mysticism and a wonderfully delicate fantasy. It had taken many years for even the cultured public to learn to appreciate the subtle flavour of his writings in prose and poetry, but now he had undoubtedly "arrived"—his name carried weight and his opinions were listened to with respect by the thinkers of two continents. A thin booklet of essays—"The World in Travail"—had even sprung to the position of a "best seller," much to the astonishment of its publishers.

Dr. Wycherley, who had a natural gift for the making of friends, found an unusual difficulty in getting in contact with Norman Fordyce. It was not until they had seen one another for two or three days that he found himself able to approach the subject of the spiritualistic séances.

It was evening, in the Piazza San Marco, after dinner. They sat at a table outside Quadri's, under the broad colonnade of the square, sipping their coffee. Mrs. Fordyce, planning to leave them together, had stopped at her hotel with some slight excuse of a headache.

An orchestra was playing light, gay music in the open square. Around it, visitors in evening dress, hatless, mingled with the strollers of the city. The moon rode high—serene, unclouded.

"Moths," mused the dreamer, as with a slight movement of his tapering fingers he indicated the circling

crowd. "What is the soul of a moth? A restless craving for the light of pleasure—a reaching out with gross fingers for what can never be touched without the searing of disillusion. If they would but turn their backs upon the light and seek in the outer darkness for the realities that have no meretricious brilliance. The unseen—the real, the *keenly real!*"

"It needs a sure step to tread the outer darkness," returned Dr. Wycherley, thinking of the spiritualistic experiments.

"But the rewards are great—greater than anything material earth has to offer. To clasp hands across the infinities of space—to thrill to the thoughts of those who have passed into the realm of the untrammelled spirit!"

"I, like yourself, am an enquirer. My life has been spent on the borderland of the known and the unknown. Above all I have learnt this: to tread very warily in the unlighted region. There is firm ground, and there is the quagmire."

"Do you believe, Doctor, in the life after death?"

"I believe—yes. But I have no proof as yet."

"Do you believe that those who have passed over can communicate with us who are left behind?"

"I wait the evidence."

"There is evidence already."

"Inextricably tangled with fraud."

"Not in my own case. I *know*—past all doubting."

"That is a very strong statement."

"I can prove it to you!" said Fordyce with sudden fire.

"How?"

"Come with me to-night to the house of Signora Franchini. I am to have a sitting at ten o'clock."

"She would probably not care for my presence," objected the doctor, knowing that objections would fan the sudden flame he had aroused.

"She would welcome any friend of mine," answered Fordyce, "if he comes in the spirit of genuine enquiry. It is only the grossly material sceptic we object to."

"One must needs be a sceptic before one can be a thorough believer."

"Yes, I agree. It was so in my own case. Come, but do not expect too much from the first sitting. Conditions are not always favourable. We have to learn what the best conditions are. We have to grope in the outer darkness."

"If I come," replied Dr. Wycherley, "you must allow me to come as a scientist."

"And that means——?"

"That I must exhaust all normal explanations before I allow myself the supernormal explanation."

* * * * * * *

A gondola threaded them through a labyrinth of narrow waterways overhung by the balconies of dark and silent houses musing on their dead past. The curious warning cry of the gondolier as he steered his craft round a blind corner cut sharply into the silence of the dark water-lanes. Occasionally an answering cry would meet his, and the two black gondolas would steal past one another like two creatures of the night bent on errands of mystery. Here a vine trailed down its

long groping fingers over a wall that hid a garden, but mostly their path lay through canyons of dead stone unrelieved by any green of living plant.

The gondolier brought them gently against a flight of stone steps leading from the water-depths up to an oaken door studded with heavy iron bosses. The windows on each side were guarded with a criss-cross of iron railing. It was the ancient palace of some long-dead merchant prince of Venice. The only light in the house came from a window on the second story, stealing out through the chinks of heavy curtains.

Fordyce pulled at a bell-rope of metal, and an answering clang echoed around the canyons of the waterway. After a long wait an aged manservant appeared at the door, holding a lantern in his hand. He led the way into a bare stone entrance-hall and up a broad unlighted flight of steps to the second story.

It was a welcome relief to arrive in the lighted room where the Signora received them. There was little in the way of furniture in the room, and the heavy dark curtains to the windows gave it almost the aspect of a mortuary-chamber, but the lights of the candles in their sockets were at least human and cheering.

The Signora was a woman of forty, well-preserved, with a wealth of lustrous dark hair and enigmatic eyes that held deep reserves under a smile of welcome. Fordyce introduced her to the doctor; the two chatted for some minutes in an interchange of unimportant trivialities. Her words were seemingly frank and open, but Dr. Wycherley, keenly on guard, sought beneath them for the real woman. She spoke English admirably,

but with that careful valuation of words which marks one who speaks in a foreign tongue and has not acquired the easy slurring of the native.

"I welcome any enquiry that is unprejudiced," said the Signora, "and especially do I welcome any enquiry that is scientific. There is nothing to conceal. If it please you, Doctor, search the room to satisfy yourself."

"Thank you—I do not think that necessary," replied Dr. Wycherley, knowing that if fraud were afoot, there were a hundred unexpected ways in which it might be carried out.

"All I ask is the open mind and the fair play," pursued the Signora. "There are some who come to a séance to play practical jokes or to tell untruths as to what they see and hear. But in your case, Doctor, I am sure there is nothing of the sort I should fear. You are a scientist—you will be ready to testify even against your previous convictions, if you receive proof."

"Most certainly."

"But you must not expect too much all at once. Conditions are not always favourable. We do not yet know what conditions are the best. We must grope in the darkness, so to say."

The close resemblance of these words to some previous remarks from Fordyce did not escape Dr. Wycherley. Evidently one of the two had borrowed thoughts from the other.

The Signora drew close the heavy black velvet curtains by the windows and the door so as to exclude the faintest trace of light from the outside. She placed three chairs at the points of a triangle, leaving a space

a couple of yards wide in the middle. Here she stood upright a long metal horn open at both ends—somewhat like a coaching horn. After asking permission, she extinguished the candles, and the three sat in utter darkness on the chairs at the three points of the triangle.

The darkness was so complete that it was impossible to distinguish one's hand even a few inches away from the eyes. It became almost painful to keep one's eyes open.

The Signora began to croon very gently a lament from the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. Her voice was beautifully soft and flexible—with the softness of deep velvet. One's senses sank to rest in its yielding depths.

Then half-an-hour passed in utter silence. Whether the Signora or Fordyce had passed into trance, Dr. Wycherley had no means of telling.

A faint odour began to fill the room—very faint and elusive. Dr. Wycherley strove to name it to himself. It was . . . yes, hawthorn, the sweet smell of an English countryside in May.

Fordyce spoke suddenly, with a huskiness in his voice: "The scent is beginning. She must be near to us now."

"Hush!" said the Signora gently.

Ten minutes passed. The silence began to be oppressive in its insistent pressure on the senses—as though it called for the will to yield itself utterly to the fascination of the darkness and the unknown.

"I see the light—from the direction of the doctor," whispered Fordyce huskily.

Dr. Wycherley turned in his chair. A faint phosphorescent glow was visible in the depths of darkness behind him. It seemed to spread out in rippling waves, and then to die slowly away.

"They are approaching," said the Signora reverently. "Let us prepare our minds to receive their message."

For a quarter of an hour utter silence, utter darkness reigned. Then quite suddenly something in metal touched Dr. Wycherley on the shoulder and clattered to the floor.

"Some spirit wishes to speak to you," said the Signora. "Do not be afraid. Pick up the horn and put it to your ear."

Dr. Wycherley, to give an unprejudiced trial to the séance, groped for and picked up the metal horn, and placed it to his ear.

"What do you hear?" asked Fordyce presently.

"Only a sea-shell murmur from the air-currents in the horn."

"Listen carefully," advised the Signora. "There may be a message for you from some dear one."

"I hear nothing beyond the sea-shell murmur."

"Then place the horn in the middle between us, and we will wait again for the will of the spirits. It is difficult for them to communicate with us—very difficult. We must have patience."

Dr. Wycherley obeyed, and again there ensued a long spell of that will-enslaving silence.

Then the horn touched Fordyce on the shoulder.

He picked it up and placed it to his ear, waiting eagerly for the whispered word.

"Who is it?" they heard him ask of the darkness, with a wondrous tenderness in his voice.

"Is it Eithne? . . . Do you know who is speaking to you? . . . Yes, my darling, it is Dearheart. Have you some message for me? . . . Our holiday in Galway? Yes, yes, I remember. How could I forget it? . . . When the tide trapped us amongst the rocks. Yes, yes. Tell me what I said to you. . . . My Eithne! Oh, my darling wife! Tell me more—tell me more! . . . I can't hear now—your voice is so faint. . . . I can't hear. . . ."

And after an acute silence: "She has gone!"

"I do not think we shall receive any more to-night," said the Signora, and presently she rose to light the candles.

CHAPTER XXII

BREAKING THE CHAINS

"WELL," said Fordyce eagerly, when they were again in their gondola. "Are you satisfied, Doctor?"

"I am completely satisfied," returned Dr. Wycherley significantly.

"Then you believe at last?"

"First answer me this: you claim that the horn was raised from the ground by spirit agency and not by a human hand? That the scent and the phosphorescent light were not the result of human agency?"

"I do!" replied Fordyce. His every feature conveyed his intense belief in the reality of the séance. "That scent was hawthorn—hers, her favourite scent. The voice was hers—the every inflexion was as she used to speak to me. And what she whispered was only known in detail to us two. No one else on earth could possibly have known the very words I said to her when we were trapped by the tide on that Galway coast. What more complete proof could one ask for?"

Dr. Wycherley sickened as he realised the utter meanness of the medium's trafficking with a man's most sacred feelings. As Mrs. Fordyce had said, her son was rapidly becoming obsessed by this communing in the darkness. The Signora had him definitely in her vel-

vety clutch; what her next move would be was not difficult to guess. So far she had been shrewd enough to keep the money side in the background, but presently, when the hook was ineradicably fixed in her victim . . . !

"It is no proof at all," answered Dr. Wycherley gently.

"No proof! You mean to imply that there was some trick used? You mean that the Signora could have spoken the words which came from my dead wife? Words known only to Eithne and myself? Oh, you scientific sceptics are too impossible!"

"There was no trick used in that," replied the doctor evenly.

"Then what is your accusation?"

"Merely an elementary mind phenomenon, which you mistake for a voice from the other world. An illusion of the senses."

"Prove it!" cried Fordyce heatedly.

"I will certainly prove it. To-morrow, at midday, in your own room, without any of the meretricious trappings of the séance. We will come back from the outer darkness to the wholesome light of day."

"How?"

"You will see to-morrow, if you are open to obey my instructions," said the doctor firmly, and would give no further detail of his plan.

Fordyce meditated in angry silence during the rest of the journey home. The call of his dead wife was still ringing in his ears against the cold scepticism of the scientist.

"Dearheart!" she had whispered.

* * * * * * *

At midday the doctor and Fordyce were alone in the latter's sitting-room. The doctor had drawn the blinds to screen off the full blaze of the sun, and had arranged an easy chair, in which he invited Fordyce to place himself.

The poet did so reluctantly.

"Is this to be some hypnotic trick?" he asked.

"Nothing of the kind," replied the mental healer gently, passing over the implied accusation. "I merely wish you to be comfortable and to let your thoughts centre on your memories of the past. Rest in this chair for half-an-hour. I will leave you alone and return later."

At the end of half-an-hour the doctor entered the room quietly with a large curved sea-shell in his hand.

"Hold this to your ear," he said, "and rest peacefully."

He withdrew to a corner of the room away from the poet's line of sight, and sat down to wait.

Ten minutes had perhaps elapsed when Fordyce spoke out with a tense eagerness in his voice.

"Is it you—is it you, Eithne? . . . Yes, I am here, next to you. Speak your heart to me, dearest! . . . Do I remember the farmhouse on the Galway coast? Yes, yes! . . . The little lamb we found on the mountainside and brought home with us—yes, yes! . . . Oh, Eithne, how your voice thrills me! Tell me more! . . . If those days could only come back again! You won't leave me, dearest, will you? Come to my bedside every night and speak to me as you are speaking now. . . .

What keeps you from me? . . . I don't understand. I can't hear what you are saying. . . . Your voice is so faint now. . . . "

There was silence, and then Fordyce rose brusquely from his chair. His eyes were alight with joy as he faced the doctor.

"She came to me!" he cried.

Dr. Wycherley shook his head gently. "What you have heard was the echo of your own memories. Your temperament is very highly strung, and you have the power of projecting spoken memories into the shell just as many other people have the power of projecting their visual memories into a crystal."

"I tell you it was her very voice!"

"A vivid echo of memory. Come, Fordyce, you must face realities." The doctor laid a kindly hand on his shoulder. "I know that I am harrowing your feelings with this normal explanation of your experiences. But I am doing it for your own sake—and for the sake of your mother. The dead have their claims upon us, but the claims of the living are greater. . . . Your mother."

Fordyce moved over to his desk and took up a photograph. "I won't believe it!" he flung over his shoulder. "Do you want to take from me my one joy of existence, my one hope? To know her presence is with me; to have her help in all my problems of life; to speak with her constantly without a barrier between us. It must come slowly, as the Signora says, but it will come! Complete communion!" There was rapture in his voice.

Dr. Wycherley realised that he, as well as Mrs. Fordyce, was powerless against the subtle influence of the Signora. She seemed to have coiled her will around that of Norman Fordyce. Only one course remained, if Fordyce were to be saved from the mental breakdown which the doctor clearly foresaw. That course was to go straight to the Franchini woman and try to buy her off.

With a blank cheque in his pocket-book, the doctor took gondola to the dead palace where the Signora had her present dwelling. She received him with the mark of graciousness of a thorough woman of the world, and for some little time they interchanged the conventional nothings that correspond to the elaborate courtesies of two rapier opponents. Finally the doctor steered the conversation round to the object of his visit.

"I have been demonstrating a little psychological experiment to Mr. Fordyce," he said. "I have been repeating for him, in daylight and in his own room, the echo of memory phenomenon which occurred here last night."

The Signora's eyes narrowed.

"Continue," was her only comment.

"He is largely convinced."

"Of what?"

"That it is a phenomena with an entirely normal explanation."

"Indeed?"

"I want you to help me to complete the proof. Of course I recognise that such a service on your part would call for a substantial recognition."

"Please put your meaning more plainly."

"I want to offer you now such a sum as would only come to you very gradually from Mr. Fordyce, even if he were to continue to seek your services as a medium. A present certainty in place of a future uncertainty."

"A bribe!" was the Signora's scornful comment.

With that tone of scorn, the key to the situation lay in Dr. Wycherley's grasp. Her object lay beyond money. This woman wanted more than Fordyce's money . . . then she must want *Fordyce himself*.

But how was this possible—seeing that his devotion to his dead wife was of the very fibre of his being?

And then, from his wonderful store of knowledge of the mental cases of the whole world, there came to Dr. Wycherley the remembrance of a parallel case he had read of in an obscure Russian journal of psychology. A strange, fantastic, almost unbelievable case. But what had happened once might happen again.

The doctor gave no outward sign of what was passing through his thoughts. With seemingly short-sighted obstinacy he pressed the money offer, produced his blank cheque and a fountain pen ready to fill it in, and received a crushing refusal and an unmistakable hint to terminate his visit.

He took his departure, and returned direct to Fordyce, whom he found deep in meditation.

"I want to ask you one very personal question," he said. "Do not answer it unless you choose to do so."

"Ask it," replied Fordyce listlessly.

"Has the Signora ever made evident her infatuation for you?"

Fordyce answered with an indignant denial.

"She will," affirmed the doctor.

"Out of the question!"

"Suppose . . . suppose she were to claim that your dead wife were becoming materialised in herself—and that the soul of Eithne Fordyce was being reincarnated in the body of Signora Franchini? Would you believe such a claim?"

Fordyce stared at him speechlessly.

"That is the warning I have to give you," pursued the mental healer with deep earnestness. "Continue with your séances if you feel that they are leading you to a higher plane. But if the Signora should broach such a suggestion—as I believe she will, very gradually, very subtly—then remember that I gave you warning. Let that be the test of the quagmire I fear."

* * * * * * *

It was some four months later that Dr. Wycherley again met Mrs. Fordyce and her son. The change in Norman was patent—he seemed revivified to new energy and new enthusiasm.

"You are wonderful," said Mrs. Fordyce to the mental healer.

"You have given me back my son. But how did you bring it about? He always refuses to tell me just why he broke off abruptly with his séances. They continued after you left Venice, but a fortnight later Norman suddenly took a strong dislike to them and announced his intention never to touch spiritism again.

He said it was primarily due to you. But how was it brought about?"

Dr. Wycherley shook his head kindly but firmly.

"If your son does not wish to tell you," he answered, "I fear you must not ask the solution from me."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HOUR OF ELEVEN

IT was on his way back from Madrid, where he had been called into consultation over a mental case in the family of the Minister of Justice—a case important in itself but not specially novel or interesting to record—that Dr. Wycherley had stopped at Barcelona to look up an old acquaintance of his in the person of Superintendent Brennan.

Brennan, late of Scotland Yard, had been appointed by the Spanish Government to a specially-created police post at Barcelona in order to put down for them the anarchist element in that turbulent city. Barcelona with its surrounding province of Catalonia is the Ireland of Spain—distinct in character, aims and aspirations from every other part of the kingdom, always in covert or seething opposition to the central government. Brennan had had to work with the iron fist, and inside six months he was the best-hated man in the city.

The mental healer had called upon him in order to hear how he was progressing in his dangerous new post, and by way of answer the police officer had passed over to him a note written in the dialect of the province and signed with eleven red stars. In translation it ran:

Eleven o'clock of the night is the hour we have fixed upon. Guard yourself as you will, that hour will be fatal for you. We strike in the ways you least expect!

* * * * *

(Signed) *

* * * * *

"Melodramatic beggars, aren't they?" said Brennan, with a lightness in his voice that did not ring quite unforced.

Dr. Wycherley examined the note with deep concentration, while the police officer lay back in his armchair and gently stroked his pet cat curled up on his knees and purring in sleepy contentment. This was the famous Charles, the one-time mascot of Scotland Yard, which Brennan had taken with him as a companion to his new sphere of work in Barcelona.

The handwriting of the note was thin, jerky and ill-controlled.

"A fanatic's writing," commented Dr. Wycherley, and closed his eyes in order to sense its inner meaning more vividly. "This is not an idle threat. . . . I feel the intensity of hatred underneath it. . . . The man is burning for revenge."

"There are eleven of them apparently," replied Brennan, referring to the point that each star of the signature was in a different hand.

"Yes, but the central star carries to me the most vivid sensations of hatred. That man is *dangerous*—the others are merely his tools."

"They're a cowardly crew—these Spanish anarchists," said Brennan. "And yet"—he lowered his

voice, and the forced lightness had died out of his tones—"and yet they are beginning to get on my nerves a little. I wouldn't say this to anybody but yourself."

The mental healer had the very rare gift of inspiring confidences; there was that in his personality which made people trust in his discretion without hesitancy.

The police officer continued: "That note reached me a week ago. None of my men can trace who wrote it or who posted it. I've put out some pretty strenuous enquiries, as you may imagine, but I can't get the writer. . . . Since I received it, eleven P. M. has certainly been a not too pleasant hour for me. About eleven on Tuesday night, when a strong north-easter was blowing, I was out in the town and had two big tiles miss me by a fraction of an inch. That may have been mere coincidence. But Thursday night about eleven I was fired on from an empty house; Saturday night about eleven I was just in time to discover a time-controlled bomb under my bed and throw it into my water-jug."

His eye involuntarily went up to the clock on his study mantelpiece, a large presentation clock. It was marking half past ten. "It's now Monday night," said Brennan, "and probably something else in the way of a stab in the back is waiting for me at eleven."

Struck by a sudden thought, he jumped up brusquely—upsetting the sleeping Charles—and rushing to the mantelpiece began very cautiously to open the works. But there was no infernal machine concealed inside it, and the police officer returned to his chair with apologies.

"Excuse me. This kind of life makes one nervy. One doesn't know what coward's trick they'll try next. It's much easier to protect other people than to protect oneself. . . . Charles, come here!"

But the cat, grievously offended at the brusque upsetting, stalked off to an open window and made his way into the night.

"That eleven o'clock device is the scheme of an educated man—a man of refinement," said Dr. Wycherley, again studying the note signed with the eleven stars.

Brennan looked up sharply, and then nodded assent. "That's right! If I could get a line on the man! . . . But wouldn't it be possible for you to—what's the word?—psychometrise him from that note?"

"That is exactly what I have been trying to do," returned the mental healer. "But the note is not sufficiently fresh. I merely get the sensation of burning revenge underlying it. If only—" He paused, deep in thought.

"Yes?"

"If only I could obtain some object he has handled quite recently, it might be possible."

"The Saturday night bomb has been destroyed," said Brennan regretfully. "Or it might have helped you."

"Most probably it was placed in your room by one of his confederates—one of the ten other stars of the signature—and in that case it would have been useless for the purpose."

Brennan went over to a sideboard and unlocked it

with a Yale key. As he produced a decanter of whisky and a gasogene he remarked significantly: "I usually take a nightcap before going to bed, and I keep the apparatus under lock and key. That's one danger the less."

Finding the gasogene nearly empty, he re-filled it with water from a water-bottle also kept in the locked cupboard, and then looked around for sparklets of compressed gas. Apparently he had run out of them, and so he rang for his English housekeeper and had her bring him a fresh box from the store-cupboard.

Breaking the wrapping of the cardboard box, he took out one of the steel sparklet bulbs and inserted it in the gasogene. The water bubbled violently as it became charged with the gas released from the metal bulb.

Brennan poured himself out a stiff whisky and soda. "I know that I needn't ask you to join me," he said, and raised the glass to his lips.

With a sudden lithe movement most unexpected in an old man, Dr. Wycherley sprang up from his chair and dashed the glass away from the superintendent's lips.

"Look at that brownish vapour in the gasogene! It means released nitrous oxide. . . ."

". . . and poison in the sparklet," finished Brennan grimly, setting his square jaws even squarer. "The box was bought in Barcelona. Inside ten minutes we'll have that chemist in handcuffs."

He turned to a desk telephone and rung up sharply.

* * * * * * *

After twelve hours of repeated questioning inside prison walls—questioning conducted by the Spanish police with no gentle hand—they could get nothing of value out of the unfortunate chemist from whose shop the box of sparklets had been bought.

The box had been sold a week ago; by his new assistant; he himself was not in the shop at the time; the new assistant had left suddenly; the name was Fernandez and the address he gave was Calle de los Cuarto Amigos, 62; he himself was known to be a staunch loyalist all his life and a most respectable householder; he knew nothing about the box beyond the cash book entry that it was sold; not if they imprisoned him for life could he tell them more than he was telling them now; etc., etc.

The address of the assistant of course turned out a false one; the description of him was inadequate for identification in a large city such as Barcelona; in brief, the trial proved itself a *cul de sac*.

The evening after the frustrated poisoning, Brennan and the doctor were again in the former's study. Brennan was pacing up and down, his brows furrowed with deep thought, while Charles, from the hearthrug, looked up at his master with the half-closed, watchful eyes of the cat.

Brennan stopped suddenly in his pacing. "Doctor," said he with deep feeling, "you must go. Barcelona is not safe for any friend of mine. They may get me any day now. If it's a bomb, that will mean general destruction, and anyone who's with me will get hurt or killed. You'd better leave Barcelona by the midnight

express for Port Vendres and French soil; there's more than an hour to catch your train."

Dr. Wycherley, for reply, said briefly, "Hold out your arm."

The police officer, though wondering at the request, did so.

"See," said the doctor, "how the pulse is shaking your fingers. No," he added quickly, "don't think that I imagine you afraid of these anarchists. It means that you are not in good bodily condition; that the several attempts on your life have affected your nerves; that at this time particularly you need an Englishman by your side. So I remain—until you have settled with the man of the red star."

"But this is police work!" protested Brennan. "I appreciate your pluck immensely, Doctor, but you're not a young man, and—" He hesitated and broke off, wishing above all to avoid hurting the doctor's feelings.

Dr. Wycherley smiled. "That is such a narrow, professional way of looking at the problem. As I see it, from the outside point of view, police guards are not going to help you greatly. You are fighting an exceptional man—a man of brains and refinement—and these Spanish police proceed as if they were dealing with some common workman."

The clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven, and as the chimes carried through the room the two men, actuated by the same thought, listened intently in silence for what might follow.

Brennan at length picked up the broken thread of

conversation: "It's good of you, Doctor—I appreciate it immensely. For to-night at least I ought to be safe. The house has been searched from garret to cellar—every nook and cranny. I've got men posted all round. If anyone gets through the cordon it will either be by treachery on the part of my men or by a miracle. . . . Great heavens!" he broke off. "What's the matter with Charles?"

The cat had risen from the hearthrug and with head thrown back was snarling and spitting venomously at, apparently, nothing. Strange detail: its eyes, though wide open, were fixed in a glazed stare as if they were blinded.

For a moment a shiver went through Brennan's broad frame at this uncanny sight. "He's seeing ghosts!" he cried. And then, pulling himself together: "Charles! Charles! Lie down. Back to your rug, sir."

The cat turned its head towards the voice, like a blinded animal, and with a furious bound leapt in the direction of Brennan, claws wide and angry.

Brennan dodged it by an inch or so, but the cat turned in its leap and made back for him. A second leap, and its open claws would have been into him, had not the doctor pushed over a small table in the nick of time and caught its leap in mid-air.

"He's mad!" cried Brennan, and snatching up a poker stunned the animal into insensibility. "Whatever can have happened to the cat?"

Dr. Wycherley was tying its legs together with a handkerchief. He did not answer for a few moments,

but cautiously bent down to get the odour of the cat's breath.

"Cannabis indica," he replied. "Indian hemp. Someone must have given it a dose early in the evening."

"The red star man."

"Probably."

"So that it would turn mad and fly at me?"

Dr. Wycherley bent closer over the unconscious animal. "I get traces of another odour like bitter almonds. That would be cyanide. Yes, the claws have been dipped in cyanide. If it had scratched you——"

"Good God! What a devilish scheme!"

"That man must have had the cat in his hands sometime this evening," pursued the doctor, with the zeal of the scientist lighting up his countenance. "Just what we were wanting for the psychometric experience —something that he had recently handled! Splendid, splendid! Now I'll try to get an impression of his appearance."

Brennan looked in amazement at Dr. Wycherley. He did not understand the scientific temperament, and the way in which it would override all ordinary feelings. For the moment Dr. Wycherley had completely forgotten that the murder of his friend had just been frustrated by a hair's breadth; his thoughts were centred on the possibilities of his experiment. For the moment he was the embodiment of the professional experimenter.

Lifting the cat up, he laid it on Brennan's desk, and making sure that the legs of the animal were securely tied against any movement on awakening, proceeded to

lay hands upon it with closed eyes, deep in concentration.

Presently his left hand stole towards a scrap of paper on the desk, and Brennan, guessing at his wish, passed over a pencil.

Dr. Wycherley said not a word, but his left hand began to trace on the paper lines and shadings that presently developed into the sketch of a man with a short dark beard and deep-set, fanatical eyes. A scar ran on his forehead from the left eyebrow to the line of the thick, dark hair, diagonally.

Brennan, watching with keen intensity, clenched his fist triumphantly.

"I know that man! Luiz Arrida. He's a lawyer of the city, and has always been reckoned as a loyalist. I've actually worked on committees with him. I'll have him arrested at once."

"No," said Dr. Wycherley, sharply, as Brennan laid hands on the telephone.

The police officer paused in surprise.

CHAPTER XXIV

AFTERMATH OF REVENGE

IT had taken long argument before the doctor had convinced his friend of the essential logic of the extraordinary course of action he proposed. Brennan, with a life service in the police behind him, was naturally inclined to the routine procedure of arrest and public trial and an object-lesson to the revolutionaries. He ignored the fact that many such object-lessons had been demonstrated in the courtyard of the grim prison fortress of Montjuich, and yet had only served to throw fuel on the fires of hatred.

"This Luiz Arrida is an exceptional man," the mental healer had urged. "Let us deal with him in an exceptional way—the psychological way."

Keen discussion had taken place over the general plan and then over the details, but eventually Brennan accepted the strange experiment, more on the weight of Dr. Wycherley's personality than on any conviction of success. In the early hours of the morning the police officer wrote and posted off a letter to Señor Luiz Arrida, asking him to call that afternoon to take directions for the drafting of a will. Since Brennan intended to settle on Spanish soil, the letter explained, he judged it desirable to have a will drawn up according to the Spanish legal formalities.

When at his office desk Arrida opened his morning's mail and read this letter, his first feeling was a grim and silent amusement. So Brennan intended to settle on Spanish soil? Perhaps he would do so in a sense far removed from his intention. It made a pretty jest.

Then came suspicion of the letter. Was it some trap? Well, in that case there would be an automatic pistol in his pocket, and some lively shooting.

But the dominant feeling was a burning hatred of this Englishman who had come to smash an iron fist into the revolutionaries, the patriots of Catalonia. He, Señor Luiz Arrida, was the instrument of God designed to drive the Englishman back to his own land. The scar on his forehead flushed a dull red with the uncontrollable anger surging through his veins. Perhaps that afternoon's meeting might show him some new way to accomplish his purpose.

Yes, he would certainly obey the call.

As he drove in his smart motor-car through the broad central streets of modern Barcelona, slashed yellow and purple with the flooding sunlight on the stone walls of substantial modern business houses, he fingered an automatic pistol in his coat pocket. It was one of those deadly miniature weapons that spit out ten shots in a few seconds. If a finger were laid on him while in the house of the police Commandant, he would deal out death in an instant.

Under the dark archway that led to the *patio*, Arrida pulled a bell that clanged echoingly down cool stone corridors. For a moment only he had a chill of misgiving at this venturing into the house of his enemy,

but quickly reflected that Brennan could scarcely have connected him with an anarchist organisation.

Besides, he had his automatic pistol with him ready for instant use.

Arrida was shown by the manservant into the cool shadows of the *patio*, where lounge chairs stretched invitingly under blossoming orange trees odorous with scent. To his surprise, he was received by Dr. Wycherley, who introduced himself and offered the visitor a chair.

"The Señor Commandant will be here presently, will he not?" asked Arrida. "No doubt he has been taking a long siesta."

"He is dead," answered the mental healer very simply, while his grave dark eyes read deep into the soul of the lawyer.

Elation, misgiving, triumph, curiosity—all these buzzed through Arrida's brain before the conventional answer framed itself on his lips: "I am extremely grieved to hear it. He was a capable officer and very courageous—a great help to the Government in the quieting of the city. Yes, I am particularly sorry to hear of his death. It must have been very sudden?"

"He died this morning. There was an attack made on him by his pet cat—it went suddenly mad and flew at him. The scratches became poisoned in some manner."

"*Madre de Dios!* What a strange end!"

"The news is being kept very quiet until his successor is appointed," continued Dr. Wycherley. "They have telegraphed to London this morning, and a reply

is being awaited. They have offered the post to another famous Scotland Yard man."

Arrida was profoundly startled. He had not reckoned before on such a probability. Surely no man in his senses would take up Brennan's post after what had happened during the past days? And yet, with these mad Englishmen, one never knew what to expect.

"I am telling you all this," pursued the doctor, "because we can trust in your discretion."

"Naturally, naturally! This terrible affair has greatly shocked me. Is there nothing I can do?"

"If there is any legal formality in which you can help us——?"

"Certainly! With the greatest pleasure!"

"Mr. Brennan has been laid out on the couch in a room adjoining. Would you care to see him?"

For a moment a gleam lighted up the eye of the fanatic, but he regained his mask and answered with a conventional, "I should be glad to see the Señor Brennan once again."

In a room with close drawn curtains Brennan lay on a couch covered with a white sheet. Dr. Wycherley led his visitor into the room, and reverently turned back the sheet to uncover the face. It was white and stiff and motionless.

Then he asked quietly: "Shall I leave you with him?"

The lawyer nodded assent, his words sticking in his throat unuttered, and Dr. Wycherley withdrew *to leave a murderer and his victim alone.*

It was a strange whirl of human emotion that eddied

in that darkened silent room after the mental healer had left, closing the door behind him. Arrida's veins surged with the passion of triumph as he looked on the still white face of the man he had done to death. Hatred satisfied to the ultimate end—he had the cup of satisfaction filled for him to the brim. He sipped at it lovingly, gloatingly, as he looked on his victim with the eyes of a fanatic.

For a moment he stood motionless drinking in the atmosphere of revenge accomplished.

Then he moved forward to place a hand of triumph on the dead man's face, but before the body he checked himself with a shiver of superstition. Some day, in another world, he would have to answer for that crime before One to whom nothing was hidden. To touch the dead man would, according to the superstitious working of his mind, add to his crime.

His diabolical scheme of the maddened cat and the poisoned claws had succeeded, and now . . . Yes, and now? Brennan was dead, and they had wired to London for another Brennan to take his place.

The same work to do all over again! The thought came to him with a sudden brusque burr of disgust. As Dr. Wycherley had sensed, Arrida was a man of education and refinement, and the reaction after sated revenge came upon him with a sensation almost of nausea. Brennan had been "stabbed in the back," in unfair fight, and the anarchist organisation would expect Arrida to deal with Brennan's successor in the same way.

It was slimy work!

Involuntarily he wiped his hands on his handker-

chief. He found that they were clammy with sweat, and a stinging realisation came to him of the silent revolt of the body against the deed it had carried out at the bidding of his will. He had had revenge in full, and now it nauseated him. He dropped on his knees and began to pray.

It was thus that Dr. Wycherley found him as he entered noiselessly with an open telegram in his hand, and he knew by the head bent in genuine supplication what must be the dominant feeling now in the murderer's mind.

Arrida started as though caught in some guilty action, but recovered his composure in an instant and rose quietly to his feet after a few moments.

"Well?" he asked, with the look directed at the open telegram.

Dr. Wycherley handed it to him. "As you will see, the offer has been accepted, Mr. Brennan's successor is ready to take up the post in a fortnight's time."

Lawyer-like, Arrida was carefully examining the telegram, but there was no suspicion under his automatic action. The telegram was perfectly genuine, and he realised that with these mad Englishmen no other result could be expected. If one of them were killed off, another could always be found to take his place.

Dr. Wycherley had moved over to the body to put the sheet back over the face. He gave a sudden exclamation of surprise.

"What is it?" asked Arrida sharply, and his hand went towards his hip-pocket.

"There is colour coming slowly into the face. I feel a return of the pulse. Quick, call the household!"

* * * * * * *

Half an hour later, when Brennan had been put to bed and was apparently on his way to a marvellous recovery, Arrida proposed to take his departure. The matter of drafting out a will could of course wait a day or two.

But Dr. Wycherley drawing him aside, asked for a few moments' private conversation, and led the way to the darkened room where the body had been laid out a short time before.

The lawyer, though keenly suspicious of a trap, followed the mental healer and took the chair as requested.

"To begin with," said Dr. Wycherley quietly, "I am an old man and unarmed. Nor are there any watchers of this room."

"I fail to understand," answered Arrida coldly.

"I mean that there will be no necessity to draw that weapon from your pocket."

The lawyer remained silent.

"I know, of course, the share you have had in the administration of cannabis indica to Mr. Brennan's pet cat. I also know of . . . No," he added quickly, "please don't think that I place myself in any judicial capacity. In fact, I have advised the Commandant to take no action against you, of any kind. He has accepted my advice."

The lawyer rose to his feet. "This conversation is meaningless to me. Explain yourself, Señor Doctor!"

Dr. Wycherley shook his head gently. "Let me repeat again that you are free to go when and how you will. There will be no proceedings taken against you. Tell me this, if I am wrong in my deductions, why did I find you a little while ago on your knees praying to your Maker to forgive you your crime of murder?"

He fixed his keen searching eyes on the lawyer, and the latter quivered involuntarily at the truth of what he was hearing.

"You have escaped that crime by what seems a miracle. And you are glad! Your better self had revolted! When you stood in this darkened room alone with your victim, what was your ultimate thought—satisfaction or remorse?"

Arrida had sunk to his seat again and one hand was twitching nervously at a loose thread on his coat sleeve. He uttered not a word.

"You have learnt a great truth," pursued the mental healer earnestly. "That there is no satisfaction in revenge. That revenge accomplished turns bitter in the mouth. Have I not read your innermost thoughts?"

"You are a strange man," answered Arrida hoarsely. "What is it you want from me?"

"Nothing material. I do not ask, I give. All that I desire is that you should realise to the full *the meaning of revenge*. If Mr. Brennan is removed, another takes his place, as you have seen. What good purpose can it serve to plot against his life?"

"The freedom of my country!" replied Arrida, with sincerity ringing in his voice.

"Which you will obtain, if your cause is just, by

other and higher means. Assassination is not revolution—no one realises that more clearly than yourself. Your aim is a noble one, but what of the means you have employed? Now give me your hand and tell me that when you fight in future, you fight fair."

Many had said that there was resistless command in the personality of Dr. Wycherley, gentle as his methods might be. Here at least it was proved true, for Luiz Arrida gave his hand in a silence that was deep with sincerity.

When Arrida had left the house, and Dr. Wycherley with a great relief in his heart had returned to the Commandant of Police, the latter asked:

"What happened while I was in that cataleptic trance you put me into? I remember nothing from the time you had me under the influence until the time I woke up in bed."

"What happened?" answered the mental healer thoughtfully. "In brief, the revelation to a man of his own soul."

CHAPTER XXV

COURTESAN SANDS

IN pursuit of his life-passion, the study of the human mind, Dr. Wycherley had decided one summer on a tramp through Brittany. It is a land of strange superstitions—superstitions that reach back through the centuries beyond the Christian era and link to-day with the age of the Druids and even with the cradle-time of the Aryan races. There live in one corner of Brittany a people who are as it were an outpost of some Mongol race, driftwood left behind by some mighty race wave of invasion over Europe. In their high, prominent cheek-bones and close-set eyes, one can read the wash of the Tartar blood. In their customs and in the strange superstitions they have grafted on to their Christian faith, one can divine the remnants of a religion five thousand years old.

To get close to the people he wished to study, Dr. Wycherley avoided the towns and the hotels, and sought his lodging in wayside farmhouses and fishermen's cottages. It was thus that he came to stay with old Gil Maurtain and his wife and Yvette his grandniece, in their cottage by the sands of Plouharnez.

Six miles across stretch the sands from Cap Plouharnez to the Bec de Pieuvre; and ten miles out they

stretch at the lowest spring tide from river-mouth to beyond the Rock of the Black Virgin.

Sands glittering yellow under blaze of sunlight; sands golden-orange under slant of sunset; sands glistening grey under a sky of scurrying, ragged storm-clouds; sands that attune themselves to every mood of the heavens; sands ever changing under the restless sweep of the tides and yet ever the same; sands that smile to men and lure them and trap them and mock them.

Courtesan sands.

At full-moon tide the whole sands are clothed with the mantle of the ocean, and fishing boats saunter slowly above them dragging in their wake invisible seine-nets. Then the sea will withdraw for mile after mile, unveiling the seductive charms of the sands—smooth, glistening, sensuous. At full ebb of the spring tides a man may walk dryshod the whole ten miles from the shore to the Rock of the Black Virgin, if he choose the right hours and path, and avoid the trickling sand-streams and the treacheries of the known quicksands. Here and there over the wide stretch of the sands are lines of thin poles which act as landmarks to the fishermen and those who drag for eels and crayfish.

Without such guides, even the shrewdest sandsman might fall victim to the clutches of the siren whose bridal bed is the quicksand.

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Dr. Wycherley, with his keen intuitive sense, realised from the first evening of his stay with the Maurtains that under the placid, somnolent exterior of the cottage

life there smouldered a drama ready to burst into flame at an instant's notice. He sensed it as vividly as a man can sense a coming thunderstorm. On the psychic plane, the air was electric. And so he resolved to remain on at the cottage. His help might be needed.

Old Maurtain was more than agreeable to the extension of the doctor's stay. It meant money, and money was the ruling passion of the old sandsman. While other passions had burnt themselves out, this one had intensified with age. The less he could use money, the more he coveted it.

They were sitting one evening on the wooden seat outside the cottage door, waiting the call to supper, when the old man suddenly raised a gnarled finger and pointed East across the bay.

"See you, it has returned," he exclaimed.

Dr. Wycherley's sight was not so keen as the sandsman, and it was a little time before he could locate the object pointed at—a dark speck flying low across the sands against the background of the cliff named the Bec de Pieuvre.

"An aeroplane."

"A child of the devil," answered Maurtain, with an ugly frown criss-crossing the age-lines on his forehead.

"You say it has *returned?*"

"It was here in May, two months ago."

"No doubt these sands make an excellent ground for trial flights."

"It will bring ill luck upon all of us. I must burn a big candle to the Black Virgin."

"You mean at the shrine on the rock yonder?"

"Yes, the shrine to Notre Dame des Mors. We of the sands call her the Black Virgin."

"Who owns this machine?"

"He is not one of us, but a stranger. He has built himself a shed across the bay. He calls himself André Vic."

"I know the name." It was that of a young professional aviator who had taken part in the Paris-Rome flight—a mechanic rapidly making fame for himself in the aeroplane world.

"It should not be allowed," said the old man sullenly. "The sands are ours. It will spoil the fishing."

"How?"

"The noise of this devil-bird frightens away the fish. They will leave us and find a new home. But besides that, it is unlucky."

Yvette came out of the cottage to tell them of supper ready. She was scarcely eighteen, lithe and slender, contrasting sharply with the other girls of Plouharnez, a type somewhat short and stocky. Her finely-spun fair hair was gathered demurely under her snowy coif like a Quakeress. An artist would have claimed her for a model.

As she came out by the open door, her keen eyes sighted the monoplane, now resting motionless on the sands across the bay. She said nothing.

Dr. Wycherley, noting that she saw and yet made no comment, sensed some connection with the electric restlessness underlying the placid interior of the cottage life.

"It is an aeroplane," he ventured.

"Yes, monsieur," answered Yvette without raising her eyes to his.

They went in to their homely supper, and the old man asked the blessing of God and of the Black Virgin upon the meal. Dr. Wycherley, who respected all religions, bowed his head reverently.

Late that night, when the household should have been fast asleep, Dr. Wycherley awaked to a slight noise in the room adjoining his. Impelled by a sudden instinct, he threw aside the bedclothes and went to the window.

Yvette, with a dark cloak thrown round her shoulders, was lowering herself out of the window of her room. She dropped lightly to the ground, and began to walk rapidly eastwards along the grass of the foreshore. Presently she turned down to the sands and started to cross them in a line for the Bec de Pieuvre. Dr. Wycherley watched her until she was lost to view in the darkness.

Now he understood one element in the drama of the cottage.

Yvette was early about the house the next morning, at work on her household duties. Although she must have walked twelve miles between midnight and dawn, to her lover across the sands and back, Dr. Wycherley saw in her no signs of fatigue. She was singing softly and happily when he came down to breakfast.

The tide now covered three-quarters of the bay. The waters were a-ripple with a gentle breeze from eastwards.

"I should like to visit the Rock of the Black Virgin,"

said the doctor to the old sandsman. "Can I hire a boat and someone to accompany me?"

"Certainly, monsieur, that is easily arranged. Yvette will take you out to the Rock. There is a good sailing breeze, and she handles a boat well."

The girl accompanied Dr. Wycherley to the mouth of the tidal stream, a mile or so away, where their boat was moored to a primitive form of wharf. It was a small, stout dinghy with a lugsail. In it the two made out by the winding channel of the stream and so on to the open waters. In a couple of hours they had reached the Rock, and were climbing to the shrine.

Dr. Wycherley, not usually interested in religious emblems except in so far as they bore on his own line of study, showed a strong interest in the sculptured figure that stood in a niche near the summit of the Rock. It was cut from some very hard stone dead-black in colour—a stone quite unlike the grey granite of the rock itself and certainly not to be matched in the whole of Brittany. Dr. Wycherley knew it for the same stone as the mysterious *lapis nigra* of the Forum at Rome, about the origin of which archeologists argue heatedly.

Even more than the stone itself did the figure interest the mental healer. The pose was set and formal; the face hard and sphinx-like.

"Do you believe this is a statue of the Virgin Mary?" he asked of Yvette.

"Of course, monsieur."

"What does the *curé* of your parish think?"

"He has wanted several times to have it taken away, but we of the sands would not let him."

"The face is very cold and hard."

"Now it is so; but sometimes she smiles."

"Smiles?"

"Yes, monsieur, when Our Lady wishes to bring good fortune to anyone." The girl began rapidly to relate stories of good luck amongst the fisherfolk—a record catch, some wreckage washed up on the sands, once the actual wreck of a cargo steamer on the Bec de Pieuvre. All these she attributed to the influence of the Black Virgin. The sincerity of her belief was beyond question.

"I will light my uncle's candle," continued Yvette, "and perhaps Our Lady will be gracious and smile on us."

Old Maurtain had given her a candle to burn before the shrine. He had been careful to scratch his name on it, so that the Black Virgin might know that the offering was his. Yvette now set the candle in a metal casket to one side of and below the figure, and lit it, watching the face of the statue intently.

Against the sunlight the candle struggled feebly, but presently a cloud passed over the sun, and in the semi-darkness of the niche where the statue was placed the candle-light flung sharply on to the face of the Black Virgin, altering completely the normal fall of the shadows.

"See, monsieur!" exclaimed the girl joyfully.

Dr. Wycherley nodded his head in silence. The upflung candle-light had brought a new expression to the cold features of the statue—almost a sardonic smile. The imagination of the fisherfolk would easily construe

this to a smile of gracious benediction. There lay the power of the statue—in the auto-suggestion it roused in the minds of the devotees. Feeling themselves to be lucky, it naturally followed that they would put out their best exertions—and so " luck " would come to them. Dr. Wycherley could easily understand that the *curé* of the parish—and for that matter, even the bishop of the diocese—would be powerless against the smile of the Black Virgin, this pagan statue from the mists of antiquity.

The cloud passed away from the sun, and the features changed back again to the set, sphinx-like expression of before.

As they started to descend the Rock, a faint whirring noise caused them both to look up to the sky. The aeroplane was soaring far above them at a height of several thousand feet. Suddenly the whirring ceased—the motor had been shut off. The air-craft dipped sharply downwards, and began to descend in a series of spirals. It came down until, like a seagull, its feet almost touched the water, and then with a rasp the motor came into action and the aviator sped off and upwards, waving his hand to the girl on the Rock.

Yvette waved her handkerchief back to him.

" Have you ever been up in the air? " asked the doctor.

" Once, monsieur," answered Yvette, with a deep blush in her cheeks. " But my uncle did not like it."

" He is prejudiced against the aeroplane? "

" Yes, monsieur."

"And he has other views for your future, has he not?"

The girl looked startled. "How did monsieur know that? Did my uncle tell you?"

"No; but I can sometimes read thoughts."

A sudden flaming passion came into Yvette's eyes. "*I hate him!*" she cried.

"Your uncle?"

"No, Etienne!"

Dr. Wycherley waited for her to say more, but seemingly she had repented of her confidence, for she changed the subject at once and spoke only of impersonal matters.

When they returned to the cottage, it was to find a visitor to table—a powerful, hard-bit, dark-haired man of thirty-five or so, with prominent cheek-bones and eyes set close together.

Old Maurtain introduced him as "my friend, Monsieur Etienne Concarnot." A *patron*, he added, meaning that he was an owner of fishing-boats.

* * * * * * *

The storm was near at hand.

Dr. Wycherley felt the psychic tension as they sat at table. The *patron's* eyes were constantly on Yvette, but the girl avoided his gaze and answered questions briefly and in a low voice.

After the meal, the household were very evidently waiting for the doctor to withdraw and leave them to themselves, so he took books with him and went out walking around the bay.

Certainly he had no right to interfere in the family

affairs of the Maurtains. Yvette must fight her own battle against her people. And yet, if there were any way in which he could help her . . .

He felt a sudden desire to see the young aviator face to face and judge what kind of man he was. Accordingly he made for the hamlet near the mouth of the stream, and engaged a tumbledown carriage at the inn to drive him round to the far side of the bay.

At the end of a tedious, jolting drive, Dr. Wycherley found himself at the field where the young aviator had built his hangar—a long, low shed in galvanised iron. Apparently he lived with his mount, for there was no other building near, and a thin curl of smoke from a chimney on the tin roof suggested a cooking-range somewhere inside.

Dr. Wycherley traversed the field on foot. Through the open door of the hangar he saw two young men intently at work on the wing of the machine, fitting some new stays.

He watched in silence until one of the men looked up abruptly and jerked out:

"Who are you? We don't want any idlers around here!"

The young fellow was clean-shaven, clean-cut in feature, brisk and authoritative, and the impression he gave to the mental healer was that of a healthy young mechanic-athlete very much wrapped up in his work—one of the modern, wholesome young Frenchmen so utterly different from the comic types of the English stage.

It was not a pleasant welcome, but Dr. Wycherley did not resent the words or the tone of voice. This

young fellow was on his own ground and quite within his rights to order any stranger. The doctor replied:

"I am a scientist, and I am staying with Gil Maurtain and his wife . . . and Yvette."

Something in the tone of Dr. Wycherley's quiet words seemed to appeal to the young man, for he answered rapidly:

"Good. Any friends of theirs are welcome here. My brother"—jerking his hand towards the other man, younger than himself and less decided in feature and manner. "Want to see my new flier?"

"I should be very much interested."

"It's my own design." He proceeded to expound the points of the machine with enthusiasm.

"I saw you make a splendid flight this morning. You passed very close to me when I was on the Rock of the Black Virgin . . . with Yvette."

André gave a rapid side-glance at the doctor, and then called to his brother:

"Knock off work and make us some coffee."

The brother went off obediently to another room to do so.

"*Dites donc*, what's the point of your coming here?" asked the aviator shrewdly of Dr. Wycherley.

"I come as a friend of Yvette's."

"Oh!" There was suspicion in his exclamation.

"The question I am going to ask is one I have no right to ask, and so you need not answer it unless you choose to. Do you want to marry Yvette?"

"My God, yes!" came the instant response.

"I judged that. Well, you will have to play a strong hand."

"Why?"

"There is a determined rival in the field."

"I know." The young fellow flicked his thumb and finger together in contempt. "Is that all?"

"That is all—*at present.*"

"What makes you say that?"

"I feel that—more strongly than words can put it—something big is going to happen—suddenly—like the bursting of a dam. And I am afraid for little Yvette."

Young Vic sobered at this. "Will you be staying on at the cottage until next week?" he asked.

"Probably."

"Then will you send for me at once if I should be wanted? I've got to get this flier ready for the Western Circuit Race. When I've won that, I shall take a bag full of gold to old Maurtain, and empty it all over his table. Then Yvette and I will marry."

"If you were wanted very quickly, it would be difficult to let you know in time. There is no telegraph or telephone from Cap Plouharnez to here."

The young fellow thought this over for some time.

"Here's a plan. I'll get some rockets from the lighthouse, and send them to you at the cottage. If I'm wanted in a hurry, you could fire them off."

"Suppose you were asleep at the time?"

"My brother and I take turns in watching throughout the night. Otherwise these pigs of ignorant Bretons would be wrecking my machine. Myself, I'm from Burgundy. . . . Besides that, I'll ask the lighthouse men—

they're friends of mine—to keep an eye open and let me know if you send up a rocket."

With the unconscious selfishness of youth, he had been taking the doctor's interest in his affairs as a mere matter of course. Now, however, he seemed to realise suddenly that behind Dr. Wycherley's modest and unassuming exterior was a man of international reputation—a big man. Deference came into his voice as he continued:

"Monsieur, you are very kind to put yourself to so much trouble for the sake of Yvette and myself. I owe you a thousand thanks. What can I do for you in return? Would you like a flight with me into the clouds one day?"

Dr. Wycherley smiled. "I am an old man," he replied, "and I have long ago come down from the clouds. Earth has more than enough to teach me."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GREEN FLARE

THAT night, old Maurtain was in a state of secretive excitement. Dr. Wycherley, observing him closely, knew that something vital had happened during his absence from the cottage that afternoon—something connected with the sinister figure of Etienne Concarnot.

Long after his usual bedtime, the sandsman sat on the wooden seat outside his cottage, smoking and gazing intently over the sands shrouded in the veil of the night. Dr. Wycherley, from the window of his room above, watched also, but for what he knew not.

About midnight there came a startled exclamation from old Maurtain sitting below on the wooden seat. Far out on the sands, at a distance which the darknèss made impossible to judge with accuracy, flared up a vivid grass-green light . . . then died away.

A footstep sounded near at hand. The voice of Etienne Concarnot whispered in triumph:

"Thou seest?"

"I see well," replied Maurtain eagerly. "Thou thinkest it is indeed She?"

"Who else? I tell thee that not only did She smile but also She raised Her hand and pointed . . . out yonder."

"It is wonderful!"

"My grandfather told me of this. It has been a secret in our family. Thou also must keep it secret."

"Indeed, yes."

"Now wait until to-morrow night. At the same hour She will again walk the sands."

"Blessed be Her name!"

"Remember, in what comes of this we share equally!"

"That is well understood."

The two men went into the cottage, and their whispers were lost to Dr. Wycherley.

The mental healer took pencil and paper, and with his left hand began to draw from memory a miniature of the Black Virgin, accurate to the smallest detail. He enclosed it in an envelope addressed to Professor Clovis Marnier of Paris, an archeologist of European reputation and a friend of the doctor's. With the drawing went a brief note:

"Who or what is this? Let me know immediately by telegram."

The next day there came a call for Dr. Wycherley which it was impossible for him to shelve. He was wanted at Nantes in consultation over a mental case. The call had been some days in reaching his present address, and accordingly he hastened to Nantes by the first train.

It was very late that evening when a tedious, cross-country train landed him back at the nearest station to Plouharnez. The dilapidated fly belonging to the local inn-keeper jolted him over the rough *route communale*,

through a slowly drizzling rain, to the cottage by the sands. There he found a telegram awaiting him in his room. It read:

Undoubtedly statue of Astarte or goddess with similar attributions in later times was considered goddess of love but original attribution was goddess of fortune human sacrifices were made to win her favour chiefly young maidens.—MARNIER.

Goddess of fortune! Was this the key to the mysterious conversation of the night before between Maurtain and the sinister *patron* of fishing-boats?

Dr. Wycherley went down to the living-room of the cottage to forage for some supper. Although it was very late—past eleven o'clock—both the sandsman and his wife were sitting in the room, talking in low, eager whispers. At his entrance they ceased abruptly.

"A nasty night," ventured the doctor.

"Yes, monsieur," they agreed.

"Can I have some supper?"

The wife went to fetch it.

"I have bought a little trinket for Yvette," said the doctor presently, as he sat down to table. "Only a trifle, but it may please her. You have no objection to her taking it?"

The old dame answered with a new-born self-importance: "Ah, monsieur, *now* we shall be able to buy her a gold watch and chain and——"

Her husband made a warning gesture, and she stopped short in her sentence.

"You have come into a legacy?" asked the doctor,

but the question was only to keep conversation going. The realisation had come to him that in some way the threatened storm had broken upon the household, and he was not listening with the organ of hearing, but—if one may strain words—listening with the psychic sense, his power of gathering the thought-vibrations of others.

"Something like that," was the cautious answer of old Maurtain.

Dr. Wycherley deliberately laid down his knife and fork, and with a sudden blaze of white-hot energy flung out this question, full into Maurtain's face:

"*Where is Yvette?*"

The sandsman quivered as though he had received an actual blow.

"That is not your affair!" he retorted with sullen suspicion.

"Where is Yvette?" repeated the doctor imperiously.

Involuntarily the old dame turned her head towards the window of the living-room.

"Out on the sands! On a black night like this! Do you mean to say that you have sent her out on the sands? Why?"

"That is not your—" repeated old Maurtain angrily, but Dr. Wycherley interrupted him with a fire of questions:

"Out to follow the Black Virgin? Out to the green light? Out to the *quicksands?*"

"No, monsieur!" answered the wife with real indignation and at the same time with the deepest con-

viction in her voice. "To find the buried treasure which Our Blessed Lady will lead her to! That is why Yvette has gone out on the sands! She will mark the spot with a pole, and to-morrow we shall dig up the treasure and be rich—very rich—so rich that we can——"

"You mean that this fellow Concarnot has told you to send her?"

"Yes; he could not go himself, because it is only to a young maiden that Our Lady will reveal the treasure, so we arranged that Yvette should go with a lantern and a long pole——"

Dr. Wycherley did not wait to hear more. It was the time for swift, decisive action. Only two possibilities could save Yvette from Concarnot's fiendish revenge of death amongst the quicksands. He must have arranged carbide flares to lure her out. The girl was going to her death with implicit faith in the guidance of the Black Virgin. Only two possibilities could save her now: a miracle, or rescue by aeroplane.

In his room were Vic's rockets—three of them. He brought them down and rapidly set them up in the foreshore in front of the cottage. A sheltered match set light to the fuse, and with a roar the rocket shot skywards and burst out into a drooping pendant of red stars, blurred by the drizzle of the night. A second followed, and at a few minutes' interval, a third.

While Dr. Wycherley questioned and cross-questioned the two Maurtains, now thoroughly frightened, as to the direction the girl had taken out on the sands when she had left the cottage a couple of hours before,

some of the villagers arrived, panting, in hastily-donned clothes, to learn what the firing of the rockets might mean.

Rapidly the doctor organised a search party to follow her footsteps across the waste of sands, uncovered at full ebb.

A low whirring noise made itself heard, growing rapidly louder.

"Shout!" ordered the doctor. "Shout all together, so that he will know where to land."

Presently the rhythmic drone of the Gnome motor ceased abruptly; the air-craft planed down, and with a jerk hit the sands by the cottage and ran along to a stop.

André Vic and his brother jumped off from their seats.

"What's the matter?" shouted André through the drizzle.

Dr. Wycherley ran to meet him with a lantern, explaining in rapid, terse sentences what the call to action meant.

"We'll off to find her—my brother and I!"

"No, let your brother stay behind. I will come."

"You don't know the machine."

"But I know where Yvette has gone. I can pilot you."

It was no time for argument.

"Jump in!" answered the aviator, pointing to the rear seat of the monoplane.

The younger brother held on to the tail until the whirr of the front propeller pulled the machine out of

his grasp. Like a swift-running ostrich, the monoplane shot along the sands, and then, swaying slightly from side to side, slid upwards into the air.

It was the first time Dr. Wycherley had been in an aeroplane. The rush of the air blinded him and deafened him and half-choked him. He had to fight for balance and breath before he could call into the speaking-tube a direction for André to steer. There were only two landmarks to make a course by—the light from the Bec de Pieuvre lighthouse, and the vague shape of the Rock blurred almost to invisibility in this black drizzling night. Dr. Wycherley gave a course which was, as best he could judge, the direction of the green light he had seen flare up the evening before. It was in that direction that old Maurtain, urged by the *patron* of fishing-boats, had sent his grandniece.

But the course was a hopelessly vague one. Flying low, they drove out to the tide-line, and back again, and around, and could discern no trace of Yvette. The lantern she carried would send its light a very feeble distance on such a night, and the girl herself would only be seen if they passed close to her. On that great waste of sands, six miles across and seven miles out at the present ebb-tide, the chance of finding her was pitifully small.

"The tide's on the turn!" cried André into the speaking-tube, after half-an-hour or more of fruitless search. "My God, she's lost!"

To the doctor's memory flashed back the words, "At the same hour She will again walk the sands." Did it mean that Concarnot would again have arranged a car-

bide flare, coloured green, in order to lure the girl out to the quicksands? If only——

Dr. Wycherley looked at his watch. Close on midnight. This should be the time, if ever.

Yes, there it was! The green flare was throwing out its lure into the night.

"Make for that light!" he called into the speaking-tube.

André gave a sharp turn to his steering wheel, and the monoplane bore swift and straight to the direction of the green flare. A few minutes later, Dr. Wycherley's straining ears caught a faint cry through the racket of the motor.

"We're near her! Circle round and round."

André instantly shut off the motor, and began to plane the machine round in wide circles. With the noise of the motor cut off, Yvette's agonised shrieks for help came clear to them. The young aviator took his distance with splendid judgment, and the monoplane glided down to within a few yards of her, the wheels settling deep into the semi-liquid sands with a jerk that pitched them forward from their seats as though the craft had driven into a ditch.

Rapidly fastening himself to a long rope, the young fellow climbed out from the monoplane and started to plunge across the half-dozen yards of sand to Yvette. She was buried up to the armpits by now, and struggling wildly.

He reached her; grasped at her; and the two together began slowly to sink in the oozing, sucking, slurging sands—in the clutches of the Black Astarte.

Only the rope held them to a bare chance of life, and to pull them to safety they were dependent on the strength of an old man whose muscles were rusted with age. Dr. Wycherley gave of his utmost strength, but he was unequal to a strain which would have tried even a powerful athlete. . . .

André saw that it was hopeless. He started to unbind the rope from himself, in order to fasten it round Yvette and give her the chance of life.

"Wait!" cried the doctor. A sudden inspiration had come to him. He climbed over to the propeller and twisted the end of the rope round its shaft, as though it were the drum of a capstan.

"Hold tight to Yvette!" he warned as he started the ignition of the motor.

The propeller whizzed round as it gathered in the slack of the rope; went slow to the sudden strain; and gradually the two bodies were drawn up to the aircraft —heaved out of the sucking slime, reluctant to lose its prey.

Safe! On board the monoplane, held up by its two broad wings, they could wait until the rising tide should float them off the quicksands.

In the early morning, when the tide served, a boat came out to take them from the monoplane, and to tow the machine back to land. They put Yvette to bed, so that merciful sleep might smooth over the shock of her terrible experience; but André and his brother set out at once for the home of Etienne Concarnot.

In André's breast-pocket lay curled a dog-whip, and his face was set of purpose.

CHAPTER XXVII

LABOUR AGAINST CAPITAL

ACROSS the table in Dr. Wycherley's London consulting-room sat a rough, blunt man, secretary to the National Seaman's and Fireman's Union. Now a leader of sailors in their fight against the big capitalists, he had not so long ago been a sailor himself, and the calling still showed in his bearing and in his walk. Jim Cobbold was his name.

"You've seen in the papers, sir, what Lars Larssen intends to do with us?" he was asking.

"I rarely read daily newspapers," returned Dr. Wycherley quietly. "And who is Lars Larssen?"

The secretary of the Union gave a gasp of astonishment. "Surely you're joking, sir? Not know Lars Larssen! Why, he's a millionaire twenty times over!"

"Money-making has no interest for me—anyone can get money in exchange for his scruples."

"But he's the great ship-owner, sir. Started as a cabin-boy on a trawler out of Glos'ter, Massachusetts, and worked his way right up till he owns ships all over the world. Has great offices in London, New York, San Francisco, Rio, Hamburg, Singapore, Nagasaki and goodness knows where not."

"What else is he?"

Jim Cobbold's face darkened as his thoughts of the man surged up within him. "Lars Larssen is Anti-Christ!" he cried fiercely, bringing a rough fist down on Dr. Wycherley's consulting-room table. "He'd grind us all into slavery, just to make more money! Hasn't he enough of his filthy money already? Hasn't he all the mansions and flunkeys and wine and women he wants? What could he do with more money if he had it? Tell me that!"

Then he added, remembering where he was: "You'll excuse me, sir? I was forgetting myself. It was very kind of you to see me at all, with your time so busy. But you were so good in helping my sister that time—I'll never forget it, sir, and may God reward you if *I* can't!—that I make bold to come and ask you to help us in the fight."

"The Union against Lars Larssen?"

"Against Lars Larssen and the big combine of ship-owners he's getting together. The papers are full of it. He's going to get control of every line in the world worth talking of. When they've got the combine fixed up, he'll crush us out of existence. Oh, I can see quite well what's coming—every Union man's to be kicked into the gutter. You know we're young, and we've not yet found our footing, and Lars Larssen will crush us before we've had time to get strength."

"The Union has certainly my sympathies in the fight," answered Dr. Wycherley, "but wherein can I help? This is no case for a doctor."

Disappointment crept into Jim Cobbold's face and voice. "I know that, sir. But I didn't come here be-

cause you're a doctor—I came because I know you've got such wonderful powers. My sister said to me, she said——"

Dr. Wycherley interrupted him with a gesture. "Surely your only chance is to strengthen the Union as rapidly as possible, and get public sympathy on your side?"

"There's no time, sir. If this had come eighteen months later, or even twelve months later! But with your wonderful powers I was kind of hoping—" he paused irresolutely, for he had no definite plan in his mind.

Dr. Wycherley rose and laid a kindly hand on the sailor's shoulder. "I am no worker of miracles," he said. "The Union must not look to me for help—it must win through the efforts of its leader. Fight for public sympathy—get the British public with you."

"Unfortunately it isn't only them, sir. This fight is international. There are all the foreign Unions, too, and we can't get welded together properly."

The doctor's manservant knocked and entered to announce a patient.

"Good-by, sir," said Jim Cobbold, "and thank you all the same."

But there was disappointment in his voice, for he had hoped for miracles.

* * * * * * *

The newspaper stir over the great shipping combine died down quickly as a storm in party politics turned public attention in another direction. But the fight between Lars Larssen and the world of sailormen went

on in grim silence, working undergound with a fierce intensity of purpose to an end unsuspected by the Unions or the newspapers, or even the ship-owners whom Lars Larssen was using as tools to work his will.

For Lars Larssen was no ordinary successful man, no ordinary millionaire. The brief description given of him by Jim Cobbold did not do justice to his personality. The son of Scandinavian immigrants to the States, factory-workers, he had run away to sea at the age of thirteen, with the call of the ocean ringing in his ears from the Viking inheritance that was his. But on this was superposed the fierce desire for success that formed the psychical atmosphere of the new American environment. As a boy in the smoke-blackened factory town, he had breathed in the longing to make money—big money—to use men to his own ends, to be a master of masters.

With precocious insight, he quickly learnt that money is made not by those who go out upon the waters, but by those who stay on land and send them hither and thither. He soon gave up the sea-faring life and entered a ship-broker's office. He starved himself in order to save money to speculate in shipping reinsurance. An uncanny insight had guided him to rush in when shrewdly prudent business men held aloof.

Always he speculated—took long chances. Always he saw big when other men looked at little points. Again and again he had played his entire capital on ventures that seemed mad risks.

He had emphatically "made good." Each fresh success had given him new confidence in himself and

his judgment and his powers, until at the time of the fight with the Unions he was a human dynamo of fierce mental energy. He would allow nothing to stand in his path. Scruples were to him the burdens of fools. He had commercial spies in his pay the world round. Traitors amongst the sailors and firemen and dockers did his will in splitting up opposing forces. To the great end he had in view no means of help was outside his moral pale.

Such was Lars Larssen. He had no wife living—only his boy Olaf remained to him. A fair-haired giant in build, with inscrutable eyes and mouth set grim and straight—such was Lars Larssen.

The battle ground of the fight was the world, and so its importance was masked to those who were not looking upon it with eyes that ranged the wide world. The dockers' strike in Buenos Ayres did not seem to have connection with the lockout in the Pacific coastal trade of North America or the raising of rates in the carrying trade between the Far East and Europe.

It was not until many months later that the guns of the fight sounded loud in the ears of the English public. On some trifling excuse, the International Federation of Ship-Owners had declared a lockout against the English Union—no Union man was to be employed on their vessels. Scratch crews were picked up here and there to work for the freight ships, while fifty thousand English sailors, fighting for their right of manhood, were thrown out to starve. At the seaport towns there were picketings on the part of the Union men, and bloody reprisals on the part of the scratch crews, mostly

foreigners, who had been brought by the Federation to help in the lockout.

To direct the fight from near at hand, Lars Larssen had pitched his headquarters at his great London office in Leadenhall Street.

"Mr. Lars Larssen to see you, sir," announced the manservant to Dr. Wycherley in his London consulting-room, some six months after the interview with Jim Cobbold.

Dr. Wycherley had trained himself to exhibit no surprise, but he was certainly surprised at the visit of the great ship-owner. It seemed as though, against his original intentions, he was to be drawn into this fight of masters and men. The piteous distress of the Union sailors and their families had been brought home to him on a recent visit to the slums of Cardiff (where he had picked up the strange case of William Owen Gwynn, madman, poet, genius and dolt), and his broad humanitarian sympathies had been stirred by this unequal struggle of fifty thousand poverty-stricken men against the irresistible millions of the Ship-Owners' Federation.

The words of Jim Cobbold—"Lars Larssen is Anti-Christ!"—were ringing in Dr. Wycherley's ears when the shipping magnate was ushered in.

At once Dr. Wycherley felt the overpowering personality of the man—the fierce mental energies that were held in check within him at the bidding of his will. Here was the strength of a leviathan—balanced, poised, ready to be turned in this direction or that at the will of the controlling ego.

Yet the interview started on easy, frictionless, almost

commonplace lines. Lars Larssen had come straight to his point.

"I had heard of your exceptional powers as a psychologist, Dr. Wycherley," he said. "I want the best specialist in the world for this case of mine, so I come to you."

"Have you brought the boy with you?" asked Dr. Wycherley, drawing a rapid mental conclusion.

"In the next room. I'll explain before you see him. He's fourteen. My only child, and I want him to take up my work when I die. That means training out of the ordinary. To take up the work where I leave off wants brains, grit and something beyond them." There was no brag in his tone—Lars Larssen was merely stating facts.

"Training that must mean a heavy burden on childish shoulders," commented Dr. Wycherley.

"Olaf has a weakness that must be cut out of him. It's fear—funk, to put it bluntly."

"He will probably grow out of it."

"He *must* grow out of it. I killed fear in myself before I was his age—punched and kicked it out of myself by means of the sailors on the *Mary R.* of Glos'-ter. Used those men as whetstones. Butted into them till they grew afraid of a cabin-boy! You notice that I limp still? I reckon that limp has been worth some tens of millions of dollars to me."

"And you have been training your boy on the same lines?"

"At his preparatory school I told him to fight every boy in the place until they acknowledged him master.

When he used to come home licked and with his tail between his legs, I lammed him with a strap, trying to get grit into him. Don't think I'm a hard father—I'd give my eyes to have Olaf a man that people will respect and fear."

"Yours, then, is the gospel of fear?"

Lars Larssen's eyes narrowed a shade as they looked straight into Dr. Wycherley's. "That's my concern. I'm here to consult you professionally on behalf of my boy. You can name your own fee—I shan't haggle. Can you cut fear out of my boy?"

"That depends on whether it is constitutional or acquired. It also depends on the ulterior object of the operation."

Dr. Wycherley's left hand was making a clean-cut little miniature on a sheet of letter-paper of the grim, powerful face on the other side of the consulting-room table. Lars Larssen glanced at it: "You're an artist, too?" he asked.

"No; scarcely that. I take records of my cases, and it saves time to do it while I'm talking."

"Yes—good! That's a useful trick. Could you teach my boy to do two things at once?"

"I have not yet decided whether I will take up the case or not."

The ship-owner's mouth tightened a shade. He was not used to allowing opposition to his wishes. "Didn't I say you could name your own fee? I come to you because I hear you're the best man at this mental job, and I pay the price you name. It isn't constitutional fear in the boy—it's acquired. His mother was no

coward, or I'd never have married her; I'm no coward. When I tell you I'm afraid of nothing on earth or in heaven or in hell, I'm telling you the literal truth. But Olaf, I believe, got frightened by some stupid nurses when he was a little child, and it kind of grew into his brain. I want it cut out. Though I've got detectives guarding him night and day against the Union men—and detectives guarding myself—he's funky of them hurting him or me. Thinks there are spies amongst the detectives. Perhaps there are—but what of that?"

"A bad environment for a boy."

"You could take him away with you to any place you think right."

"I will see your boy first, and then I will discuss my second point," replied Dr. Wycherley.

Olaf was shown in—a fair-haired, delicate-looking lad with hunted eyes. Dr. Wycherley's warm human sympathies went out to him. Only a father obsessed by the idea of domination that was the keynote to the character of Lars Larssen would have insisted on the Spartan régime that had been mapped out for the boy. To Dr. Wycherley it was patent at a glance that the son could never be what the father was trying to mould him into.

"I would like to see your boy alone," said the doctor.

And when Lars Larssen had gone to the waiting-room he settled the lad in a comfortable arm-chair and talked to him quietly and kindly for many minutes, until the flush of understanding in the boy's face showed the doctor that the sympathy contact had been made.

"Tell me now," said Dr. Wycherley, "what is it

that you are afraid of. Come, I am your friend, and I wish you nothing but good. Tell me frankly just what you feel. It will not go beyond me. Do you have bad dreams, or is it in the daytime that fears crowd upon you?"

Olaf turned his hunted eyes around towards the door before he whispered: "It's my father I am afraid of!"

"How? In what way?"

But the boy did not dare to answer.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A BATTLE OF WILLS

DR. WYCHERLEY had asked for an interview at the ship-owner's office. He had a particular reason for wishing to investigate further the mental atmosphere that obsessed Lars Larssen. In the man's own office, surrounded by what he had planned for himself, more could be gleaned than from the inscrutable eyes and the grim, straight mouth.

Dr. Wycherley had found himself drawn into the great fight between Lars Larssen and the sailormen, in spite of his original intentions. The man's dominating personality had made a profound impression upon him. It was no longer the case of a mere financial squabble—for which Dr. Wycherley had a deep contempt born of his study of mind—it was now complicated by the strange relations of father and son. And beyond this was something larger still that Dr. Wycherley sensed with his keen, intuitive perception, though as yet the feeling had not crystallized into the tangible.

In the great building in Leadenhall street which bore the simple business sign of "LARS LARSSEN—SHIPPING," a sign arrogant in its simplicity, was a room on the second floor that quite transcended Dr. Wycherley's experience of business offices. It was a

room a hundred feet long and broad in proportion—a room occupying practically the whole of the second floor. A glass-domed roof rose up centrally to the very top of the building.

A few broad tables and some chairs looked almost lost in the room, but the walls were filled with coloured charts of the world, some with scores of flag-pins upon them that doubtless indicated the positions of ships. At the far end of the room, beyond the central dome of light, was a horseshoe table covered with papers and document-baskets and telephone apparatus. In the centre of the horseshoe was placed Lars Larssen's chair. Behind his chair, hung on the wall, was a portrait of Olaf by Sargent.

As Dr. Wycherley was ushered in by a secretary, his first impression was a slight feeling of contempt for the theatrical trick that gave a visitor a self-conscious walk of some thirty yards before he reached his allotted seat at the horseshoe table. Doubtless this device had helped in business deals by bringing nervousness to a man as he walked down the long stretch of room.

But Dr. Wycherley's second impression was of a very different order. At last the vague intuitions that had been floating in his mind gathered coherence. In a flash he saw the inner meaning of this prodigal space.

It was not a mere business office he was in—it was a throne-room.

He recognised now that Jim Cobbold's estimate of Lars Larssen had been ludicrously short of the truth. Here was no man striving after the pleasures of mansions and flunkies, wine and women, amassing money

merely to gratify his sensual appetites. It was bigger game that obsessed his thoughts—power, world-power.

"I would congratulate you on your room," he said as he shook hands. "It is an office for a master of men."

Into Lars Larssen's face crept a gleam of pleasure—Dr. Wycherley had touched the vanity that lies in all men. The ship-owner replied: "In every one of my offices around the world is a room like this. I alone make use of it. When I'm away it stands for me. It's my sign.

"Above the dome," he continued, as he saw that Dr. Wycherley was keenly interested and doubtless impressed, "is the Marconi apparatus that keeps me in touch with my ships. They again link me with New York, New York with San Francisco, thence again by ship to Nagasaki, thence to Singapore, to Colombo, to Aden, to Naples, to Hamburg, to London. I'm independent of the wires and the cables."

"As I passed through the offices downstairs," remarked Dr. Wycherley, "they seemed very quiet. Your business routine must go through in very orderly fashion."

"They're quiet in the daytime," replied Lars Larssen, "because the big work of the office is at night. I have two staffs—a day staff and a night staff. To-night my men will be at work on matters that the ordinary ship-owner would leave for to-morrow. That's been one of my business rules—do to-morrow's work to-day—get ahead of the other man."

Dr. Wycherley fixed his keen, searching eyes on the

ship-owner. "When you have attained to the summit of your ambition," he said slowly, "when you are indeed Emperor of the Seven Seas, when the decision of war or peace between kingdom and kingdom lies in your hands because the traffic of food upon the seas is in your hand—what then?"

Lars Larssen flicked with thumb and forefinger at a speck on his sleeve before replying. "Was that an ant?" he said sharply, half to himself.

"No, it was only dust," answered Dr. Wycherley. "When you are Emperor of the Seven Seas—what then?"

"Then I'll flick away those who oppose me as I flicked away that—that speck of dust," was the reply, given in low, tense voice. "I, and my son after me, and his son after him."

"Do you know the story of the little Duc de Reichstadt—l'Aiglon, the son of the great Napoleon?"

"You mean that my son Olaf is another such weakling?" Lars Larssen's face grew dark with anger, but an anger the more to be feared in that it was controlled and directed, that it was held in leash.

"I do mean that."

"You lie!"

"It is apparent to all but yourself."

"You lie!" repeated Larssen harshly. "You're incompetent. You haven't read him right. He's in a funk at present, because he was frightened when he was young. But, by heaven and hell, I'll have it either persuaded out of him or beaten out of him. That's

why I came to you—I thought you were skilled in your mental quackery."

Dr. Wycherley drew a sheet of paper towards him and replied without the least change from his ordinary tone of voice: "I can cure your son—if you wish. But my price is a high one."

"Name it."

The doctor scribbled rapidly on the sheet of paper and handed it to the ship-owner. The latter glanced at it, then tore the paper into scraps.

"I thought you said a *price*," said he cuttingly.

"That *is* my price—that you send a note to the newspapers announcing that the lockout against the English Union is withdrawn, and that you have decided to recognise the various seamen's and firemen's unions in future."

"*I* pay in money."

"Money is of no value to me—as well offer me cowrie shells."

"I offer you a hundred thousand pounds. Take it or leave it."

"I leave it."

"Very well—I reckon that's an end of the matter."

"That is by no means an end of the matter," returned Dr. Wycherley. "I represent two sets of interests—those of the sailors and those of your son. For the moment let us put the question of the sailors aside. You are killing the boy because of your ins—, your fanatical determination that he shall be like what you imagine yourself to be. You recognise that he is a

'funk,' as you term it—but you don't recognise that he inherits it from yourself."

"I a funk? You must be crazy!"

"Shall I prove it to you?"

"Prove away—if you can."

"Olaf has not told me what he is afraid of but I see it now. He is terrified at the idea of what you want to make him—master of the world. You cannot understand that terror. On the other hand, you were afraid of a tiny ant just now."

Lars Larssen gripped the side of his chair with tense fingers, but he answered not a word.

Dr. Wycherley continued: "Terror of the big and vast, or fear of the tiny and harmless—where lies the essential difference? I intend to show you, Lars Larssen, what Fear means. Yes, to show you what lies within yourself, until you ask pardon of your boy for your scorn of him, and until you give justice to the men who toil for you to build up your millions.

"A little while ago you told me that this great room stands for yourself, and that when your clerks and managers enter it, even though it be empty, they think of you. It was your sign, you said. Well, the sign I put against it is the tiny and the harmless. Whenever you see an ant, Lars Larssen, think of what stands against you!"

Dr. Wycherley rose and took up his hat.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE "SENDING"

THREE days later, Lars Larssen was working late in the evening in his great throne-room, writing cipher messages to be sent by wireless to his houses in the East. He was concentrating intently, working with the fierce concentration to which he had trained his brain. Finally he grew weary, and raised his head to stretch himself.

As his eyes rose, he saw on the opposite side of the table, looking at him gravely, Dr. Wycherley. The doctor was sitting outside the brightness of the electric table lamp, as he had sat on that momentous interview.

Larssen for a moment was spellbound—for no visitor had been announced. Recovering himself, he was about to utter a question, when the figure melted away before his eyes. He rang his bell sharply for his secretary, who was working in a small room behind his chair.

"Did you hear anything peculiar just now? Anybody go out your way for instance?"

"No, sir. Nothing."

"To-morrow night and in future you will occupy that table over there."

"Yes, sir."

In the morning, as he put on the clothes his valet

had laid out for him, a speck on the sleeve of his coat caught his attention. He looked closer. It moved—it was a tiny red ant. He flicked it away sharply.

The next evening he deliberately stayed late at his office again, and again concentrated intently on his work, but looking up occasionally. He wished to reproduce, if possible, the strange hallucination of the night before. He was not afraid of it—he was merely interested.

At the office nothing happened. But as he was stepping into his motor, thinking deeply, a dim figure of some one lurking in the shadows of the car made him draw back with a start. He called the footman to him —one of his paid detectives.

"Get that man out," said he.

The footman quickly pulled a revolver out of his livery and looked inside the car.

"There's no one there, sir."

"Good!" said Larssen evenly. "Drive home."

He took out a wax match from the receptacle inside the motor in order to light a cigar. On the match was a tiny ant, and he dropped it hastily. He looked inside the match receptacle—there were several ants there.

When he arrived home he ordered the car to be fumigated, and that another one be put into his service.

He undressed for bed in a very thoughtful mood. "That figure inside the car," he meditated. "Looks as if my eyes were going wrong. Better cut out smoking for a bit."

Two days later, returning early in the afternoon from his office, he went to Olaf's playroom. In it he

had had a carpenter's bench put up for his boy to make model ships and a pugilist outfit to get him to practise boxing. But Olaf was not engaged in ship-building or in bag-punching—he was intently examining a little flat box with a glass cover.

"What have you got there?" asked his father.

"I bought it at the stores to-day, Dad. Isn't it cute? It's an ant's nest with real ants under glass. One can make all sorts of experiments with them—coloured glasses like Lord Avebury used to do and——"

Lars Larssen snatched up the box and threw it far out of the open window. The boy uttered a cry of surprise and anger.

"Why did you do that, Dad? I wanted to——"

"I hate ants. I don't want you to play with them."

"But why? I like them—they're such bully little fellows."

"I'll tell you why, my son," answered Larssen, with unusual feeling in his voice, "and then perhaps you'll understand. A long time ago, before I married your mother, I was shipwrecked on one of the desolate swamp keys of the Bahamas. They're hateful islands—nothing on them of value except the flamingoes, great blazing pink flamingoes. But the horrible part of it was the ants. They were everywhere on the island—swarming in myriads—ravenous ants with big, nipping jaws. They were in our food, in our water, in our clothes, in our sleeping blankets. You woke up at night to find them—ugh!"

"There's one on your waistcoat now!"

Larssen brushed it away as though it were some

deadly insect. His face had paled imperceptibly. "Did this come out of your box?" he asked roughly.

"It couldn't have, Dad—the box was closed up tight."

"Well, there oughtn't to be ants wandering loose in this climate."

"There are plenty of them out in the garden, in the long grass parts. But they can't hurt anybody—they're so tiny and harmless." Still he could not understand his father's horror of them.

"My God, what did you say?" Larssen had seized his son's arm.

"I only said they were so tiny and harmless."

"Who told you that?"

"No one. What makes you look so pale, Dad?"

But Lars Larssen did not answer this. "Put on your boxing gloves," he commanded roughly.

The boy reluctantly obeyed.

That night Lars Larssen slept uneasily. A nightmare came to him—a nightmare that froze him with horror. He was back on that desolate key of the Bahamas—this time alone. The swamp-land was alive with ants—great, fierce, red ants with nipping jaws that grew and grew in size. They advanced upon him as an army—a myriad army deadly of purpose. They had faces now—the faces of ravenous devils! They were going to devour him alive! He strove to fight them off, but his body and limbs were as paralysed. Now the foremost of them were swarming over him. . . . !

He awoke bathed in sweat and trembling in every limb. The moonlight shone into the room in a broad

band. Behind the moon-streak, there in the corner of the room, was the figure of Dr. Wycherley looking at him gravely.

Lars Larssen's strength of will forsook him for the moment. Unstrung by the vivid horror of his dream, he threw his arms across his face to shut out the vision, phantom or real. When his ego recovered possession of his brain and he took his arms from before his eyes, nothing was to be seen save the broad band of moonlight.

He turned on the electric light, and for the rest of the night read a novel to keep his thoughts off the ants. When daylight came there would be big decisions to be made, and he must keep a clear head. Resolutely, by sheer concentration of will, he kept his thoughts off the ants.

But his choice of book was an unfortunate one. It turned on the uncanny powers of the Indian fakirs, and one of the incidents dealt with a "sending"—a rain of frogs that the fakir materialised against a royal enemy. He threw away the book and took up another.

In the morning, as he made his way to the office, the clerks noticed an unusual tenseness in his face. His secretary said to him solicitously: "You're not looking quite yourself, sir."

"Nothing the matter."

"I'm glad to hear it."

Larssen pointed suddenly: "What's that crawling over the blue paper on the desk?"

"I don't see anything."

"There, there!"

"That's nothing, sir. Only an insect of some kind." He went to brush it away.

"Have the room fumigated this afternoon."

"Yes, sir."

A deputation from the Sailors' Union called at the office. Larssen refused to see them.

That night he slept with a stout stick by his bedside. "If he's flesh and blood, I'll kill him," was his thought. But Dr. Wycherley did not appear—only there came to the ship-owner a terrible nightmare wherein he was chained to his desk in his great domed room, and a vast army of ants advanced again and swarmed upon him—into his eyes, his ears, his nostrils . . . !

That week was a week of torture. At night the horrible dreams: by day the ants—here, there, everywhere in unexpected places. Only one or two—never in quantities, and quite harmless, but ants, real ants.

Then came the day when the ants were *no longer real*—when he fancied there were ants where none existed, and his servants and clerks looked at him strangely and seemed glad to get out of his presence as quickly as possible.

But Lars Larssen would not give in. A dozen times, a score of times the temptation came to him to write or send to Dr. Wycherley, and he thrust it aside with his iron will. He would not give in.

Nor would his pride allow him to consult any other doctor. He bought sleeping drugs, and took them in big doses. Sometimes they gave him deep sleep, and sometimes they but intensified the phantasmagoria of his tortured brain.

He left them alone and tried to do without sleep, reading the night through under the glare of the lights.

Then came the night when Olaf awoke shrieking at the sound of revolver shots, and rushed to his father's room to find him gazing wild-eyed at a broken mirror—in his hand a smoking revolver.

"There's nobody here! What are you afraid of, Dad?" he cried.

"Of nothing on earth or in heaven or in hell!" answered his father grimly. "Get back to your room!"

The next day the boy slipped off secretly to Dr. Wycherley's rooms and implored him to come and help his father, who had become so strange in his manner. Dr. Wycherley at once promised, and went to call on the ship-owner at his office.

When he was shown in he was startled at the change in Larssen. The man's eyes were bleared and bloodshot from want of sleep; his mouth was flanked with lines of tense emotion; he had in a short three weeks aged by ten years. Lars Larssen was an old man.

Dr. Wycherley was moved in spite of himself. His warm human sympathies warred with the stern duties he had had to carry out. This Lars Larssen was an exceptional man, a man beyond the ordinary pale of thought and morals—he must needs be dealt with in an exceptional way. If his gospel were the gospel of fear, he must be shown the fear to which he as well as others was subject. If he claimed the sovereignty of the earth by right of strength of will, if he claimed to trample on ten thousands of his fellow-beings by right of money—

then he must be shown the weakness of his will and the uselessness of his money.

The phantoms were a simple projection of the subconscious personality which Dr. Wycherley had willed to appear to Lars Larssen. Night after night he had thrown himself into the trance state for this purpose. The projections were entirely an effect of mind on mind —there was nothing material in them. The ants were real, and the explanation of their presence was equally simple—the footman detective was in reality an ally of the sailors.

But these two simple means of working on the shipowner's mind, acting together and re-inforcing one another, had produced an effect that startled even Dr. Wycherley. He was moved to pity at the havoc they had wrought.

"What have you come for?" snarled the shipowner.

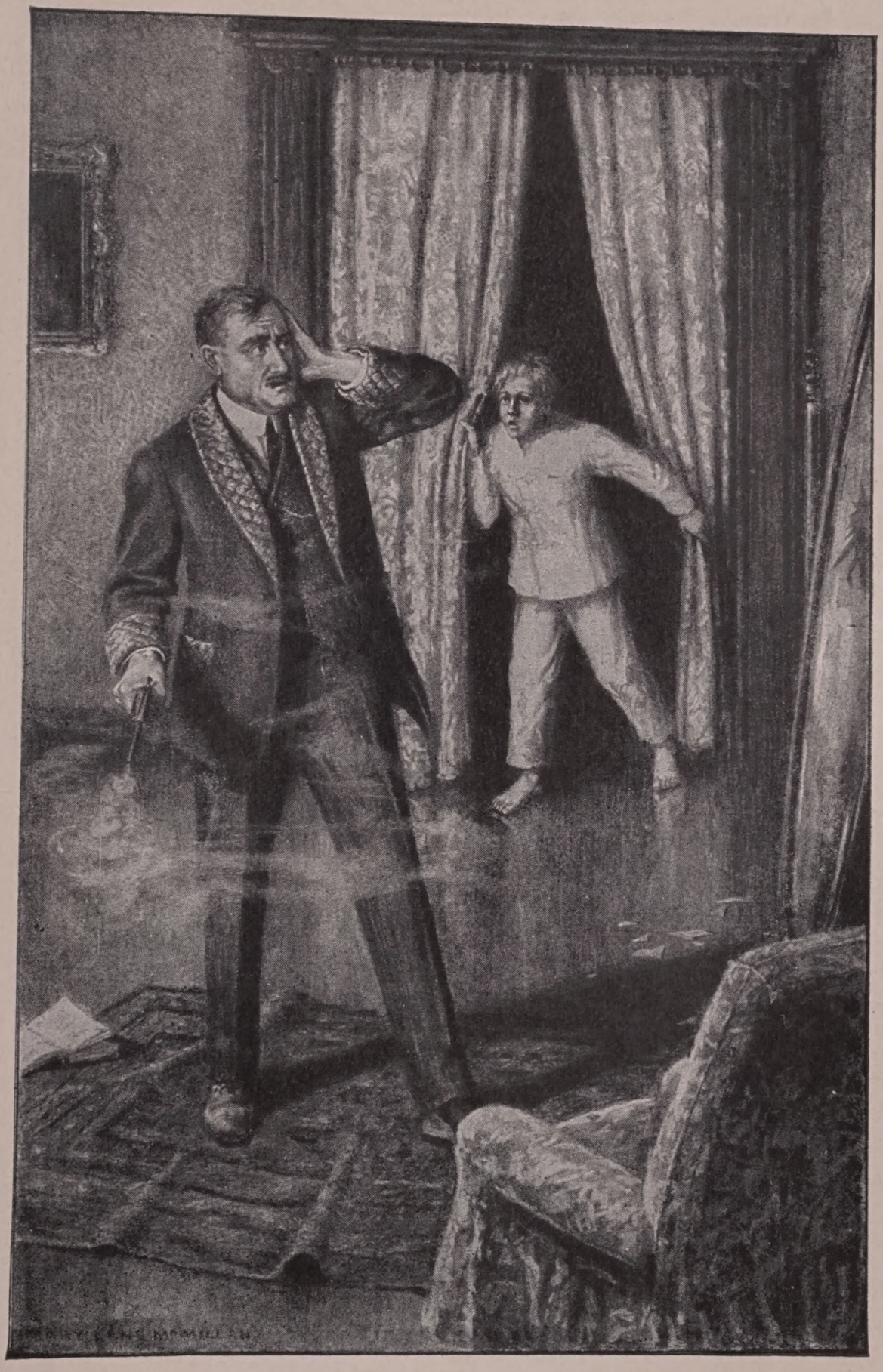
"To offer you peace with honour."

"I make no terms. D'you think you can move me with your ants and your ghosts?" He laughed mirthlessly.

"Come, let us be frank," said Dr. Wycherley. "You dared me to show you what Fear means—I have done so. If I have been wholly unscrupulous in my methods, that is a point which should earn your respect. The means that were necessary to the purpose I have used, just as you yourself would have used them."

"Get to your point, whatever it is!"

"You have met Fear, and now you can realise



"'There's nobody here! What are you afraid of, Dad?'"

your boy's terror at the career you had mapped out for him. Be fair to him; be fair to your sailors. Give to both their liberty of action. See the humanitarian side—crush that Napoleonic obsession which could only bring misery to all. For my part, I promise that the visions shall cease; that there shall be no more of the 'sending' of ants."

"There's an easier way for me to insure that," said Lars Larssen grimly, and drew a revolver from his desk.

Dr. Wycherley tapped the table a little impatiently, a mannerism of his when anything particularly stupid was said. "Come, come, Mr. Larssen, that way leads to nowhere. If you choose to shoot me, you are arrested and hanged. You merely show the world you were *afraid* to let me live. That hasty idea was surely unworthy of you."

Larssen lowered his revolver.

"The proposal I make is one of peace with honour," continued Dr. Wycherley. "Of my own accord I shall stop the 'sending,' and I leave it to you to do the right thing on your own initiative. There are no conditions to my promise."

"Try to get me to give in by a trick—eh?" sneered Lars Larssen in his pride. "Think I'm afraid—eh? I told you before that I fear nothing on earth or in heaven or in hell: I tell you so again. Do what you please. Now get out!"

"My promise still holds good," said Dr. Wycherley as he rose to leave.

* * * * * * *

When Olaf went to his father's bedroom the next morning as usual, he found him lying white and cold. He tried to wake his father—in vain.

The doctor certified death from an overdose of chloral. It was proved at the inquest that the deceased had been lately in the habit of taking sleeping drugs, and the jury brought in a verdict of death by misadventure. Only Dr. Wycherley doubted that the verdict was a true one, for he had looked into the soul of the man and had fathomed his overmastering pride.

Lars Larssen had been shown the Fear that lay in himself, and he preferred Death.

CHAPTER XXX

ON MEDENHAM DOWN

TWO men had toiled up the great green hump of Medenham Down—Travis Kennion, Home Secretary, a man of forty; and his friend Hatchard, the barrister, some years older.

They now stood on its summit, where the hill breaks away sheer into a chalk cliff fronting the fertile plain of the Weald of Kent. Many hundred feet below, it drowsed in the sunshine of a Sunday afternoon in summer, breathing of tranquillity and contentment and the peace of humble work carried out dutifully by simple, upright, God-fearing country-folk.

But on the summit above there was raging a conflict of emotion and will between two men of complex temperament—a conflict vital to the future of Travis Kennion. He was a man great in many respects, a man with ideals pitched high, yet with one kink of character which threatened to ruin his career and cut short his splendid services to the nation.

"I've brought you up here," said the K.C., "to try to make you realise your position. Socially and politically you're standing on the brink of a precipice. A few steps more"—he pointed to the cliff at their feet—"and you go down to perdition."

"Analogies," replied Kennion wearily, as he stretched himself on the close-cropped turf, "are all false. No one situation is like any other. I do not admit the precipice in my case."

"But you've seen the same situation in the cases of other men. Parnell and Kitty O'Shea, for instance. The lure of a bright eye—and the man throws over position, power, the world's respect, and everything that makes life worth living. As soon as your affair becomes generally known—and it's bound to leak out soon—your parliamentary career will be made impossible for you. It's sheer madness to go on!"

"A very beautiful madness," mused Kennion.

"Who is the woman?" asked Hatchard sharply. It was in a motor-car that he had seen her, at night-time, and a motor-veil and goggles make ample disguise. All he knew was that she was a woman of their own world, and that his friend was passionately in love with her.

The Home Secretary made no reply. This was not the first time he had been questioned and cross-questioned and reasoned with by the K.C., and he was weary of it all—obstinately, fiercely weary of it.

"If there's no consideration of duty to your party that will move you, think at least of your wife!"

At that Kennion blazed up into sudden anger. "Leave my wife out of it!" he ordered. "You don't understand, and never will! My temperament is so complex that I scarcely understand it myself. I am like a bulb—one covering under another, one under another, right down to a tiny core. At that core is

love and respect for my wife. *This* "—his reference was plain—" this belongs to another layer of my nature."

" Slough it off."

The sudden blaze of anger had died down, and a great weariness had now come into Kennion's voice as he replied: " I can't. . . . I don't think I want to. . . . I only want to be left alone. I've been sleeping badly of late, and I'm tired. There's the worry of my Bill. Is it worth while thrashing it through in face of all the opposition it has roused? That is what I ask myself. Haven't I done enough for my country? Is the fight worth while? "

His voice trailed away.

From far below came the silvery tinkle of bells from the cattle in the lush pastures, and a lark carolled high in the heavens. The fertile Weald lay drowsing in the summer sunshine breathing of tranquillity and contentment and peace. Into the soul of the Home Secretary crept a great longing to go down into the lush meadowland of life, to give up the fight on the heights and find peace with the woman he loved. To find peace . . .

Presently he slept.

* * * * * * *

Hatchard had wandered off moodily across Medenham Down, slashing with his stick at the heads of the yellow rag-wort. If it would have done any good, he would have thrashed his friend to bring him to a realisation of his madness. The lure of a bright eye, and a great man like Travis Kennion was to sacrifice position, power, wife, friends, and his worth to the nation! No

logic seemed to move him one iota. Who could battle with such essence of unreason?

In this mood, concentrating fiercely on his own thoughts, he almost stumbled into Dr. Wycherley, sitting in the shade of a furze-bush and studying a notebook half filled with tiny sketches of men and women—delicate little miniatures where every line expressed inner character.

Greeting Dr. Wycherley cordially, the barrister asked what brought him to Medenham Down.

"The Wishing Well at Tildenstone," answered the mental healer. "A pleasant example of faith-cure—ordinary, perhaps, yet with points of interest. I have been studying a crippled boy in the village who has suddenly regained the use of his limbs. . . . But what brings you up here? Ah, I see, something more than idle pleasure. I sense the aftermath of a storm. You have been doing battle."

"You're right. And I've lost," answered the K.C., and then a sudden idea struck him. "Could *you* take on the fight?"

"Is it within my province?"

"I'll explain, and then you can judge. Of course, what I am going to tell you will be in strictest confidence."

He went into the matter in abundant detail, telling of the situation as he knew it and his fruitless reasonings with the Home Secretary.

"A fine man," commented Dr. Wycherley. "I have the warmest admiration for his work. A statesman—

and England has too few statesmen and leaders. Yes, a man thoroughly worth saving from his baser self."

"Can you save him?"

"I can promise nothing. The problem as you set it before me is the most difficult I have ever had to solve."

"Nothing seems to move him," continued Hatchard. "He's one of your so-called 'strong men'—and he'll take advice from no one. Unless he has convinced himself, it seems hopeless to try to convince him."

"There are no 'strong men'—merely a popular fiction," answered Dr. Wycherley with his gentle cynicism. "Every man has his weakness, open or hidden. It is a matter of degree."

"This weakness is the unforgivable one for a politician. Remember Parnell and Kitty O'Shea, and many a lesser man, too! The English public is abominably hypocritical over such affairs."

"There I cannot agree with you. Men to whom power and influence are entrusted are no longer private men. They are placed on a pedestal and are expected to live on a high plane. It is one of the makeweights of power—penalty of position."

"The public attitude is utterly illogical," argued the K.C. "How can a man's private character affect the value of his public work?"

"Illogical, perhaps; but then it is sometimes extremely sensible to be illogical. That is life. You know it from your practice at the Bar. . . . Now when can I meet Kennion?"

"He is over there above the chalk cliff, but asleep at the moment."

"Excellent! A man asleep is a man unmasked. Let us go and study him."

They walked across the down, and for a long time Dr. Wycherley bent over the sleeping man, reading into the lines of his face and gathering impressions of his thoughts that surged out vaguely from his tumbled dreams.

At length the mental healer arose and drew the barrister aside. "I see one bare possibility," he said. "You told me a little while ago that unless he has convinced himself, it would seem hopeless to try to convince him. I confirm that view."

"Well?"

"*We must get him to convince himself.*"

"You have some plan?"

"The dawn of a plan. You are both staying, you told me, at 'The George Inn' at Medenham. This evening I will arrive there as a casual visitor, and you will introduce me not as a mental practitioner, but merely as a man with a special gift of inducing sleep. It is vital that he should not know who I am."

* * * * * * *

"The George Inn" at Medenham is one of those delightful old hostelries still to be found in the small country towns and some of the villages of rural England. It lies bowered in roses and clambering wistaria and honeysuckle, under the shadow of great oak trees at the foot of Medenham Down. Near by runs the sil-

ver Meden, fished by the anglers who come to stay at "The George."

Both the Home Secretary and the barrister had brought rods with them for their week-end stay, and there was no surprise at the arrival in the evening of a silver-haired old man with keen-cut features and dark, grave eyes. No doubt he was also an angler.

Hatchard recognised him as an acquaintance and introduced him to the Home Secretary, and in the starlight they sat out in the porch and chatted leisurely of things that mattered little. But under all this casual conversation—too trivial to need recording—ran strange undercurrents of thought. Early in the evening the Home Secretary had received a telegram. This lay in the outer pocket of his lounge coat, and every now and then his fingers would caress it under cover of the pocket. With the studied calmness of his face—the mask of the man of position—went a bright glitter of the eyes that could not be kept under. While he chatted leisurely on the porch of the inn, his real thoughts were elsewhere, with the woman he loved.

The barrister, also outwardly calm, was watching eagerly for the unfolding of Dr. Wycherley's plan, whatever it might be. All that had been arranged was that Hatchard should support the mental healer in any move he might introduce. Dr. Wycherley, for his part, had kept conversation on the level of the trivial so that Kennion should not suspect his real vocation and draw back into an unassailable shell of defence. First, he had to win confidence. Later . . .

What was that strange sensation, that sense of

something impending in the immediate present? It came to the sensitive mind of the mental healer as a rasping against the calm ether of the starlit night in the quiet village. Most of us experience that vague sensation of impending events at one time or other, and sometimes we act upon it against the logic of our reasoning faculties. Dr. Wycherley, with his super-sensitive perceptions, knew better than to neglect the warnings of intuition. He had schooled himself to respect and follow intuition, and in this case he made an excuse to the other two men and set out to walk to the end of the village, out into the lane which connects by a tangle of lanes with the broad highway of the London-Canterbury road. From that direction he sensed the coming of some event which would cut sharply into the peace of the village inn.

Rounding a corner between the high hedges, the glare of a motor-lamp flashed full upon him, and a car braked up on its haunches with a grinding of wheels.

"Is this right for Medenham?" asked the chauffeur. "We've got mixed up in these twisty lanes."

But Dr. Wycherley's eyes had turned to the solitary occupant of the car, a lady. Her veil was thrown back to let the cool night air play on her face, and with a shock he recognised her as Lilith Kennion, the wife of the Home Secretary. The portrait of the beautiful Mrs. Kennion by Shannon had been one of the features of that year's Academy—she as well as her husband was a celebrity. But now there were lines of pain and anxiety in her face, and in a flash Dr. Wycherley realised that she had come to a knowledge of the situa-

tion in which her husband stood and was pressing hot-haste to his side. In the present mood of the Home Secretary, the meeting would inevitably lead to a clash of wills, perhaps to an open declaration from which there would be no turning back. The situation lay poised so delicately that one jar would send the balance crashing downwards.

It was a dangerous move to interpose between husband and wife at such a crisis of their lives, but Dr. Wycherley resolved to take it. He had been reading deeply into the character of Travis Kennion, and he knew that only from *inside*, from the man himself, could help come. Urgings from outside, even from his own wife, would only drive him deeper into his mad obstinacy.

"This is the way to Medenham," replied Dr. Wycherley, "but I wish to speak first with Mrs. Kennion." He raised his hat with an old-world courtesy of manner. "I have something very important to say to you—something vital. Will you spare me a few moments?"

"Who are you?" asked Lilith Kennion.

"A medical adviser of your husband's," was the answer, whispered so that it might not come to the ears of the chauffeur. "More than that, a very sincere well-wisher. Will you not send the car ahead, and let us rejoin it presently?"

There was a magnetism in the personality of the mental healer that few could resist. His gently-expressed wishes had more than the force of commands. Lilith Kennion realised the sincerity of this stranger with the silvery hair and grave dark eyes and told the

chauffeur to drive on for a hundred yards or so and wait.

When the car had moved off, they looked at one another in silence for a few moments. Dr. Wycherley struck a match and held it up to his own face, so that she might read what he did not wish to put into words.

"You know why I am here? You came to intercept me?" she asked, with a break in her voice that held pathos.

"I know. I sympathise deeply. I have a plan to help Mr. Kennion against his—his insomnia. If you will trust him to me for a few days—*trust him implicitly*—I think you will not regret it. He will sleep well; his nerves will right themselves; he will come back to you with renewed strength and courage for his fight. Again he will be a strong man doing battle for his Bill against the weak sentimentalists and the envy and malice of public life."

"I could help him . . . perhaps."

"You cannot help him directly—you or anyone else. He has to fight himself, to conquer himself. Strength must come from inside. My plan is to help him to help himself, without his knowing it."

"And I? What am I to do?" Her voice quivered under the strain of belief he was demanding.

"It would be best for you to go away for these few days—far away. To Scotland, say . . . It is a big sacrifice I am asking of you. But you, like your husband, are on the pedestal of power, and much is demanded from those to whom much is given."

"I don't want power," she burst out impulsively. "I only want . . . my husband. The rest is emptiness."

The glory of the starlit night wrapped itself around them—the meretricious glitter of the great city with its strivings and strugglings was far away. She began to weep very softly and pitifully.

Then with a sudden effort Lilith Kennion drew herself together. "I will trust you," said she bravely, and held out her hand.

Dr. Wycherley raised it to his lips with old-world courtesy, and went to call the car back.

A little later he had returned to the flower-banked porch of "The George," and soon he had managed to introduce the topic of the mystery of sleep. Kennion mentioned wearily that he had been sleeping very badly of late, and the barrister, taking the opening, spoke of his friend's powers to induce sleep.

"If you wish for sound sleep, I can give it you," said Dr. Wycherley.

"I have heard of that kind of thing," returned Kennion. "It sounds to me dangerous."

"It rests with yourself. I do not press my gifts," returned Dr. Wycherley. "To-morrow I shall be tramping on, and we shall probably not meet again. If you wish to break the chain of sleepless nights, I can do it for you now, but not to-morrow night." There was soothing in the voice and Kennion felt drawn to confidence.

He accepted the offer, and presently in the bedroom Dr. Wycherley passed him into the lighter stages of hypnosis.

"And now?" whispered the barrister.

"Now leave us. What I have to do should rest secret even from a friend."

Far into the night the mental healer sat by the bedside of the Home Secretary, speaking softly to the sleeping man of many, many things which he should know and realise.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE FORTIETH MILESTONE

THE next morning Kennion slept late. Before he awoke, Dr. Wycherley had left the village. The barrister had to return to town for his work, but the Home Secretary announced that he would stay on at Medenham for a few days, to fish peacefully and build up his nerves. Though he had slept heavily, he had been troubled by dreams, and he wanted his brain to be thoroughly clear for his parliamentary duties. For a couple of days his Under-Secretary could take his place.

Hatchard listened to this sceptically. He had his own idea as to why Kennion wished to bury himself in the country, but Dr. Wycherley had insisted explicitly that Kennion should be allowed to work out his own salvation according to his own dictates.

When the barrister had left for London, Kennion made his way to the post office and sent off two long cipher telegrams. One was addressed to the Under-Secretary; the other to a woman. Also he telegraphed to his wife to let her know that he would not be back in town at present.

Later, he took up his rod and flies and went off to the quiet pools of the silver Meden. But his thoughts

were not in harmony with the quiet beauty of the rural scene. They buzzed within him, burst up into flame, died down into cold analysis, flared again into impetuous desires. The dreams of last night haunted him vividly and warred with his desires. They had been so extremely real—detailed far beyond the usual vaguenesses of dreamland. They *haunted* him.

In a fever of impatience—at one moment aflame, the next cold and shivering—he waited for the reply which should come to one of his three telegrams. He returned early to the inn, without a catch, to receive the answering wire.

It had not come. It did not arrive, in fact, until late in the afternoon, and when it came he crumpled it up feverishly in his hands. "Wait," it said in cipher. "To-morrow night, on the Canterbury road, by the fortieth milestone."

He must perforce wait . . . and think . . . and do battle with his thoughts.

That evening he tramped alone far over the swelling downs, and at midnight he lay down exhausted beside a furze-bush and fell into a deep sleep. A sheep-dog came up and nosed him curiously, then moved away. Another of those tramps, no doubt.

Kennion slept heavily, and again there came to him a series of dreams of a vividness that had never previously been within his experience. He awoke at dawn in the cold gray hill-mists, bathed in sweat, and with a mocking voice ringing in his ears:

"*Who are the Unfit?*"

If the day before had been a battle, to-day was

an agony of conflict. Duty—desire! Duty—desire! The heights or the meadowland? Which must he choose for the peace that would be lasting? His mind was stretched taut on a rack of his own devising.

And he was alone. No outside influence was there to throw weight into one pan or other of the balance. On himself alone rested the decision.

In his complex nature, that gave him strength rather than weakness. It is so with many of the world's great men, as Dr. Wycherley knew well.

* * * * * * *

By the fortieth milestone the white highway curves in between the swelling downs and traverses a narrow neck half-way up the hills.

The night was hot and sultry and working up to storm as the Home Secretary went to keep tryst with the woman he loved. She had arrived before him, having left her motor-car on the farther side of the hills and walked back on foot. She was young and dazzlingly beautiful. When he came to her side she gave a little cry of gladness and held out her arms. No one was in sight—the curves of the road gave them solitude.

But Kennion did not take her in his arms. His temples were throbbing, and yet his hands were icy.

"Come to where we can talk without interruption," he said, and pointed to a chalk quarry near at hand.

They went together, in silence.

"This is to say good-bye," he said with a curtness that scarcely masked the surge of feeling within him.

"No, not good-bye," she urged, and twined her arms around his shoulder. Her warm breath was on

his cheek; the soft curves of her body rose and fell with breathing.

But Kennion untwined her clasp with hands that quivered, and repeated: "It's good-bye, Vivien. I've decided. . . . For us both."

"Why?" There was sharpness in her voice now—the sharpness of a woman balked in desire. "I have the right to know."

"Yes, you've the right to know. I have seen many things these last two nights."

"Nights!"

"I saw the whisperings in the lobby, the furtive glances. Men looked away when I looked to them to nod greeting. Then I rose in the House to move the third reading of my Bill for the Segregation of the Unfit. There was icy silence. I went through my speech red-hot with passionate enthusiasm for the great service this Bill would render to the nation; but the House was icy. It was as though I were in the dock, and they were my judges. They put up Leveredge to oppose. His speech was mordant—bitingly mocking. 'Who are the Unfit?' he flung at me across the floor of the House. They threw out the Bill. Even my own friends went into the lobby against me."

"Dreams!" she cut in with a whip-lash of scorn. "And even suppose you lost all that for me. Wouldn't it be worth it? We'd go away together to where the world mattered nothing."

"We went away together. We left Lilith breaking her heart against the iron heartlessness of society. We went away together to some distant isle under a tropic

sky. The world around us was marvellously beautiful, but there was no satisfaction in its beauty. Feverishly we drowned our hatred of its beauty in the madness of love. There were hectic cases in a desert of meaningless sand. We pretended that the world mattered nothing—that we were all in all to one another. But it was pretence, and we began slowly to loathe one another for the pretence forced upon us. I saw the loathing in your eyes; you in mine. The days grew long to length insufferable—they dragged out into eons of time. . . ."

"Who has been putting these notions into your head?" she asked sharply. "Dreams don't come of themselves."

"No one. That's the vital point of it all. Hatchard had argued with me in his barrister-like way, but it left me unmoved. I'm not a man to go to another for help in the big decisions. No, Vivien, for two days I've scarcely spoken to a soul, and yet these dreams came to me with a vividness that was appalling. And at last I realised." He paused.

"Realised what?"

"That they came from myself—*myself alone.* That they were the inmost thoughts of my complex being—the glimpse of the future that only the inmost mind can perceive. They were myself speaking to myself." His voice was ringing now with conviction—the balance had swung definitely, decisively downwards towards the scale of duty. "But what I've told you is not one-tenth of all the visions of the future that crowded in upon me. The wretched beings cursed by heredity . . . the still more wretched offspring of their marriages

. . . the scrofulous, the crook-backed, the epileptic, the paralysed, the imbecile that came into being because my Bill did not pass—they stretched out in endless phantasmagoria that tore at my heart-strings. They looked towards me in silence as they passed by one by one. They *haunt* me!"

A low growl of thunder eddied and echoed among the hills.

"Come!" she said tensely, and plucked at his arm. "Come before the storm breaks. My car's below the hill. We'll talk of this again when we're in shelter. There's a cottage in the Weald I've rented. We shall be alone there. Then we can talk over this in comfort."

"In comfort? No, the decision is for now. I've decided—I go up on the heights of Medenham Down."

"With a storm breaking! You must be mad!" And she looked at him with new eyes, with a dawning horror in her eyes. "Why, you must be . . . Your nerves must be unstrung. . . . No man in his senses would . . ."

"I've never been more sane than I am at the present moment," answered Kennion. "Don't you understand my feelings after all I've told you?"

"I don't understand at all. You are supposed to be a strong man, and yet a few idle dreams——"

A blaze of lightning cut short her words. In the moment of light the milestone stood out sharply with its "XL miles" in stark shadow against the white stone.

"Forty miles," mused Kennion. "And I have seen forty years of life. It's my milestone."

She looked at him with chilly horror, thinking that his reason had tottered.

"Good-bye!" he said firmly and finally, and strode away and up the green hump of Medenham Down. She watched him for some moments at his steady, purposeful climb, and then she gathered up her skirts to run for shelter against the breaking storm.

But Travis Kennion strode on and up to the summit of Medenham Down, and the rain slashed at him as he stood on the topmost knoll with folded arms, immobile, dreaming great dreams of what he might do for his country in the days to come.

* * * * * * *

As to Dr. Wycherley's part in the big decision, Kennion never suspected. He could not know how the mental healer had sat by his bedside far into that Sunday night, speaking softly of the many things that had become woven into his dreams to such haunting effect. He could not know that the visions of the future conjured up by his inner consciousness were but the reflex of what had been poured into his ears during the hypnotic sleep. He had judged that they came from himself alone—*he had convinced himself*.

And Dr. Wycherley, on his side, never revealed the secret, even to Lilith Kennion. He saw the happiness of reunion; he saw Kennion's great Bill pass victoriously into law against the fiercest opposition ever known in the House of Commons; and he was content.

It was a triumph for the science of mind, and the keen joy of achievement was his.

THE END

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